

# 2018 Women of Excellence

## in Metalforming & Fabricating

BY LOUIS A. KREN, SENIOR EDITOR, and JOE JANCURAK, ASSOCIATE EDITOR



In 2015, one year before *MetalForming* launched its Women of Excellence awards, women in manufacturing jobs weren't feeling as positive about their industry as they are today. A study by Deloitte, the Manufacturing Institute and APICS, serves as proof:

- Compared to 12 percent in 2015, 29 percent of women in 2017 said that their school systems "actively or somewhat encourages female students to pursue a career in the manufacturing industry."
- Compared to 24 percent in 2015, 42 percent of women in 2017 were now "ready to encourage their daughters or female family members to pursue careers in manufacturing."
- Over the last five years, 58 percent have "observed marked or some positive changes in their industry's attitude towards female professional employees."

Moreover, the percentage of women in manufacturing jobs continues to creep up, from 27 percent in 2015 to about 30 percent in 2017. And many bring with

them a commitment to produce, innovate and serve as role models for the next generation of workers.

*MetalForming* magazine is proud to bring you the 2018 Women of Excellence in Metalforming and Fabricating. The honorees—19 Winners and four Honorable Mention recipients selected by *MetalForming* editors—have distinguished themselves for their on-the-job accomplishments and continuous commitment to manufacturing. The group represents myriad job functions, including operations, production, quality control and management, and shares a common trait: passion for our industry.

"While the career paths these women have taken to achieve what they have are diverse, all have found the metalforming and metal-fabricating industries to be rewarding work environments," says Brad Kuvin, *MetalForming* publisher/editorial director. "Some may say they're helping to break down gender barriers, and they'd be right. But more importantly, they are improving our

industry with their problem-solving skills and enthusiasm. *MetalForming* is honored to tell their stories."

Efforts to increase manufacturing opportunities for women while recognizing their skills is an important function of *MetalForming's* parent organization, Precision Metalforming Association (PMA), and Women in Manufacturing (WiM), an organization that grew out of PMA's commitment to these efforts.

"*MetalForming's* Women of Excellence winners are extraordinary examples of talent and perseverance," says Allison Grealis, WiM president and founder, and vice president of Association Services for PMA. "I can't help but be encouraged by their stories and accomplishments. They definitely are leading the way in driving interest in young people to pursue careers and manufacturing."

We at *MetalForming* invite you to join us in congratulating our 2018 Women of Excellence award winners. Read their stories and why they recommend careers in manufacturing for women.



### **Stacey Bales**

**Owner/President  
Bales Metal Surface Solutions  
Downers Grove, IL**

Stacey gained her start in the family business 20 years ago as office manager before assuming the presidency nine years ago, shortly after the passing of her dad, Steve Bales, who cofounded the company with his brother Mike (retired) in 1978 as Bales Mold Service. As co-owners, Stacey and her sister Sara, who serves as vice president, rebranded the company as Bales Metal Surface Solutions in 2012.

In addition to her responsibilities as company head, Stacey serves as secretary/treasurer of the Chicago Midwest Chapter of the National Association for Surface Finishing (NASF) and the Chicago Surface Finishing Foundation, and as a member of the Technology and Manufacturing Association Young Leaders Committee and The Future Leaders in Plastic group, a segment of SPI: The Plastics Industry Trade Association. Locally, Stacey is a charter member of the Downers Grove Kiwanis Club. Her awards include the 2018 NASF Award of Merit; 2017 Products Finishing Top 40 Under 40; 2016 TMA Young Leader Award; and *Plastics News* 2015 Rising Star

"As an employee," says her nominator, "I get to witness the work Stacey does to ensure our company continues performing well."

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*"Manufacturing is exciting! I love being able to see new projects every day, being able to work through complex challenges with like-minded colleagues and having the opportunity to grow exponentially both personally and professionally."*



### **Mary Jane Bushell**

**President and Chief Executive Officer  
Larsen & Shaw Ltd.  
Walkerton, Ontario, Canada**

Joining the company in a clerical role 31 years ago, Mary Jane excelled in progressively challenging roles in administration, sales and manufacturing, which enabled her to learn all aspects of the company's operations. In 2007, she was promoted to vice president of operations, where her work ethic, intelligence and natural leadership skills could be applied while overseeing all manufacturing functions. Mary Jane assumed overall leadership of the company in 2013, and has since led the effort to expand manufacturing operations into the United States with the successful opening of a hinge-manufacturing plant in Rome, GA. She'll be at the helm in 2019, when Larsen & Shaw celebrates its 100th anniversary.

Mary Jane has demonstrated leadership in every role she has taken with Larsen & Shaw, showing an exemplary work ethic, integrity, analysis and sound judgment, fairness, and compassion, her nominator proclaims. Leading by example, she always looks for the good in each person and inspires others to perform at high levels. Given all of that, her nominator says, "she would say her greatest achievement is her marriage and two daughters. I am proud that Mary Jane leads our company."

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*"New-age manufacturing involves complex IT systems, training and development programs, automation, and technology. There has never been a better time for women to expand into this space to enjoy challenging and rewarding careers."*



### **Michelle Hamm**

**Director of Engineering  
Highlands Diversified Services Inc.  
London, KY**

Over her 19 years at Highlands Diversified Services, Michelle has been instrumental in developing processes, technology and systems to support launch activities and achieve International Automotive Task Force (IATF) quality standards. These efforts have set the stage for the company's current launch activities, which include more than 200 new automotive-part numbers over the next 12 months.

Her mindset of tackling any problem and finding a sustainable solution, as her nominator notes, allows her to excel as the company's director of engineering and has earned the respect of customers. As an example, Michelle was specifically selected by an automotive client to attend a global supplier event in Japan, where she was presented with one of only two awards given to North American suppliers.

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*"Every day is a new challenge. Throughout my career I have always approached each project as an opportunity to make improvements and provide solutions that meet financial targets and timelines. I would encourage young women that enjoy problem solving, have an ability to think beyond the obvious, and have confidence in themselves and their strengths to pursue a career in manufacturing."*



### **Kris Hanson**

**Workforce Development Representative  
Pine Technical and Community  
College  
Pine City, MN**

A 13-year employee of Pine Technical and Community College, Kris, for the past two years, has served as the cornerstone of the Women in Welding grant that was awarded to the school through a Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development Equity Grant, which focuses on teaching women in the region nontraditional skills, such as welding, and assisting in finding employment in the metalforming industry.

Her nominator says Kris “goes above and beyond the call of duty, finding safety equipment and even gasoline vouchers for financially strapped students. Her community involvement and positive attitude are on full display as she connects with students at a personal level. She truly cares about what is going on in their lives and it shows in the way she helps them get ready for their future by organizing field trips to local manufacturing shops, and helping them with the soft skills necessary to complement the technical knowledge they gain from class.”

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*“Manufacturing offers a livable wage and many opportunities for trained workers, which industry needs.”*



### **Misty Hettinger**

**Welding Department Leader  
KT Fabrication  
Chandler, AZ**

A 17-year industry veteran, Misty has for the past three years been a valuable member of the KT Fabrication team, perfecting her welding skills to the level of advanced journeyman, leading the company's welding department in its custom architectural-metal fabrication and expanding her blueprint-reading capabilities.

Her nominator says that Misty represents positive change in our industry by showing that women can do anything that men can do, and that her infectious enthusiasm and optimism allow her to break down barriers. In other words, while her extreme welding talent does most of the talking, she's also mastered communication skills that enable her to effectively lead the company's novice and skilled fabricators.

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*“I feel honored to be acknowledged for doing what I truly love. I couldn't have done it without people along the way that believed in me, and took the time to help develop my skills. Don't ever give up. You can do anything you put your mind to, with hard work, dedication, devotion and passion.”*



### **Carrie Jacobson**

**Global Director of Launch,  
Quality and Improvement  
Waukesha Metal Products  
Sussex, WI**

Carrie has dedicated her 30-year career to leading and improving manufacturing. While she's been with Waukesha Metal Products for just one year, her accomplishments are many. She has implemented process-improvement and program-launch initiatives; revamped best practices and the company's quality program; improved quote-risk analysis; streamlined and improved customer audits; and coordinated the approval of the new IATF certification.

Her nominator describes Carrie as a “quick-thinking problem solver with a get-it-done personality. She leads by example and has the amazing ability to see through the weeds and blaze a trail to success. By holding herself to a higher standard, she raises the collective standards of the entire company. I've learned so much just by being in the same room with her.”

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*“During my career in manufacturing I have experienced a variety of cultures and environments that have engaged me from both leadership and quality/engineering perspectives. In each and every position and at each company where I have worked, I have been given the opportunity to grow as a person and as a professional, and have been rewarded by making a positive difference. If you find engineering or leading others through change to be a passion of yours, then the manufacturing world is for you.”*





**Stacy Johnson**  
*Purchasing Manager*  
*GK Machine*  
*Donald, OR*

Since joining GK Machine three years ago as purchasing manager, Stacy, a 25-year industry veteran, has revamped the company's purchasing department, saving money, increasing efficiencies and improving vendor relationships.

Her duties include: costing analysis of raw materials from steel vendors, parts suppliers and contract services; tracking and managing inventory costs, including interest, space requirements, heating, extra handling, extra manpower, insurance, etc.; overseeing tariff management; analyzing transportation expenses; and much more.

"Some managers are standouts and tenacious when it comes to streamlining, cost control and efficiency," says her nominator. "Stacy is that manager at our company. What is most impressive about Stacy is her ability to stay organized, her attention to detail, and her ability to recognize and follow up on issues and tasks of the most importance to the company's bottom line."

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*"Manufacturing provides the widest variety of experience possible. You have an opportunity to learn how a company functions from the point of customer inquiry all the way through to delivering a product that started from raw material. There is an opportunity for almost anyone in manufacturing and your future is what you make of it. The sky is the limit."*



**Jennifer Kalas**  
*President*  
*Irmco*  
*Evanston, IL*

At Irmco for 19 years, Jennifer, a 32-year manufacturing-industry veteran, has led the company to record growth while helping foster an innovative company culture of open-book management and development of high-technology lubricant products. As the only woman president in the lubricant industry, according to her nominator, Jennifer has helped the company successfully develop and market non-oil lubricants to industries still dominated by oil-based products. A leader in her local Evanston, IL, community, she grew up in the Detroit, MI, area, graduated from Michigan State University, and has stayed in the Rust Belt to serve metal stampers.

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*"Working in manufacturing offers women so many different career paths. Whether you prefer design, engineering, business or the plant floor, there are numerous opportunities. It's exciting to be involved in so many areas of the business and to make a product that improves the process of your customer. You are part of team where every position makes an important contribution, from product conception to the final sale."*



**Erika Klein**  
*Vice President, Research  
and Development*  
*Global Shop Solutions, Inc.*  
*The Woodlands, TX*

Erika has been with Global Shop Solutions since her graduation from Baylor University in 1993. Starting her career in customer service, Erika steadily progressed to increasingly complex roles. As vice president of research and development, she's helped the company develop innovative products revolving around shop-floor data collection, paperless shop floors, quality systems, job costing and more.

Erika has led the design, development and commercial release of the entire Global Shop Solutions ERP package, which consists of more than 25 modules. She accomplished this by motivating, coaching, growing and leading nearly 100 research-and-development employees across four teams.

Through her dedication and involvement, says her nominator, "Erika has touched thousands of lives—employees, customers, and in the local community, where she leads and supports many charity and volunteer causes."

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*"Manufacturing is an ever-changing industry that offers high-paying jobs with a great deal of opportunity. In manufacturing, you get to be at the forefront of technology—this is a great industry for women who want challenging and satisfying work."*



**Virginia Moore**  
*President*  
*Mills Specialty Metals*  
*Marietta, GA*

For 15 years, Virginia has contributed greatly to the metal-fabrication industry, beginning with her family's 100-year-old HVAC business before taking a risk eight years ago when she launched Mills Specialty Metals, which focuses on architectural metals. Described as a detail-minded leader who cares deeply about her employees, clients and industry, her awards and accomplishments are many and include *Georgia Trend* magazine's Top 40 Under 40 and *Marietta Daily Journal's* Mom of the Year. She is a Leadership Cobb (GA) graduate and alumni president, and she has served on numerous local boards and in leadership roles at her local church. Her company employs 4000 and has a high-profile project resume that includes the Coca-Cola headquarters, Mercedes-Benz stadium (Atlanta Falcons) and SunTrust Park (Atlanta Braves). Named by the *Atlanta Business Chronicle* as a PaceSetter (fastest-growing) company in Atlanta, Mills Specialty Metals also was selected as one of Cobb County's top-25 small businesses.

Her nominator states that Virginia doesn't sleep until her clients and employees are happy. Given the company's success, she deserves to sleep well.

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*"A career in manufacturing can be highly rewarding if you have determination, focus and loyalty to your company. Never give up!"*



**Sherri Nutting**  
*Customer Service Manager*  
*Almetals, Inc.*  
*Wixom, MI*

Sherri has spent her 17-year metals career at Almetals, where she is recognized in customer surveys for the service and solutions she helps to provide.

Knowing firsthand what customers need enabled her to play an important role in the development of Almetals' custom software for sales and customer service. Moreover, her experience and passion for the metals industry enables her to serve as an effective mentor for younger employees.

"She goes above and beyond to develop out-of-the box solutions tailored to meet customers' specific needs, often providing ideas that customers might not have otherwise considered," says her nominator. "To be able to nominate Sherri, who continues to lead change in the manufacturing industry and is so deserving of this honor, is a wonderful opportunity."

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*"Women have a different approach to problem solving that provides a much needed balance and diversification to any manufacturing organization. Working in a male-dominated industry brings many challenges for women, but those who are willing to accept the challenges as opportunities can reap great rewards, personally and professionally, throughout their careers."*



**Jan Sandri**  
*Founder and President*  
*FSRinc*  
*Woodland Park, NJ*

Jan has more than 37 years of industry experience as a founding member of her company. Her contributions extend from developing products that answer industry needs, such as metal-integration products, to having served as a director on the boards of several industry organizations. A women-owned business, Jan's company has grown from three to a staff of 100-plus, and strives to maintain green manufacturing processes.

Her passion to serve has benefitted her local community as she has been mayor of her hometown, Little Falls, NJ, and served on the town council; served as fire commissioner and police commissioner; and was president of the board of health. As mayor, says her nominator, "she donated her salary to local worthy causes, or to needy people, and at the beginning of each new school year, she leads the charge to work with United Way and donate supplies, such as backpacks and notebooks, to children whose families are having a difficult time keeping up with the economy."

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*"Manufacturing is a wide open field for women today. The only limits are your own personal goals. Within our metal manufacturing branch we have women in administration and working on the shop floor, operating various pieces of equipment. It's exciting because there are so many machines, and so many opportunities to use your creative talents."*



**Dierdre Scalia**  
*Inside Sales Coordinator*  
**Alliance Steel Co.**  
**Bedford Park, IL**

During her 30-plus years in the metals industry, Dierdre has held various positions representing management-information systems, customer service, inventory management, and purchasing and sales. An active member of the Association of Women in the Metal Industry for 25 years, Dierdre has served on the Chicago chapter's board of directors, and continues to volunteer and mentor the next generation of women in manufacturing.

Her nominator says that Dierdre has earned a reputation for always giving "110 percent of herself and her time to accomplish all assigned tasks. Having worked 10 years side by side with Dierdre while with a different company, I know that she is dedicated, motivated and accomplished at representing the company for whom she works. Any company she works for should be proud to have her as part of its team."

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*"There are endless opportunities in the metal and manufacturing industries for forward-thinking, detail-oriented women. As natural problem solvers, women are always looking for ways to improve and get better. This industry needs and thrives on such people for continuous improvement and innovation. I am thankful for being a part of an industry that has allowed me to be a mentor and mentee for many years, while providing me a supportive network of colleagues."*



**Mikie Simpson**  
*Inside Sales Manager*  
**Bliss Clearing Niagara Technical Services**  
**Hastings, MI**

Mikie began her career 16 years ago as an inside sales representative. Shortly thereafter she advanced to inside sales team leader. Today, as manager of inside sales, she focuses on furthering the skills and knowledge of her team to ensure that they are able to reach our sales growth and profitability targets. Currently involved with strengthening her company's application of analytical tools for sales forecasting and inventory optimization, she also assists in the advancement of her company's social-media utilization for marketing- and employee-recruitment purposes.

Mikie's nominator says that her "knowledge of all intercompany processes and procedures helps to expedite repair parts, so that customers can keep their presses running. To provide that support, her work week often extends into the weekend. She excels as a manager and fosters team building and helps to further the technical abilities of her team members.

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*"Choosing a career in manufacturing affords opportunities for growth and development in careers formerly uncommon to women. Manufacturing is a field consisting of many different paths, which allow growth and achievement in multiple areas of business. There is nothing more rewarding than being involved in an industry responsible for improving or creating technology, which shapes the world."*



**Deborah Truscinski**  
*Chief Financial Officer and Controller*  
**Winzeler Stamping Co.**  
**Montpelier, OH**

As the first female CFP/controller in the 100-year history of her company, Deborah immediately jumped in with both feet upon being hired just one year ago to learn as much as possible about her new industry and company.

"She has excelled in building in-depth knowledge about the company's financials and operations," says her nominator, "and has successfully led the recent fiscal-year-end process and audit. Deborah is not afraid to ask the difficult questions during strategic-planning sessions and holds the appropriate person(s) accountable."

Moreover, Deborah's commitment to recognizing young talent and mentoring young people is seen in the accounting co-op opportunity she launched for two local college students.

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*"Manufacturing is a great career choice for women because, with hard work and discipline, we can create positions that meet our individual and family goals. Our natural instincts to multitask, communicate and build unity allow women to contribute to strategic missions that optimize company performance. Our contributions are recognized as we dedicate ourselves to improving every aspect of manufacturing."*





### **Debra Wies**

**Tool Design Engineer  
Shaeffler-LuK USA LLC.  
Wooster, OH**

Debra has implemented many line upgrades by thoroughly looking into assembly dies and fixtures. Forty-one years in the industry, including 33 with her current company—"I starting my career on a drafting board, and now I perform 3D computer modeling," she says—provides her with the experience and knowhow to succeed as tool design engineer.

At Shaeffler-LuK USA, Debra works closely with production leaders and group leaders from the assembly lines, and is quite familiar with the needs of those working on the lines. As a result, she does not hesitate to include answers to those needs into new tooling and line setups.

"She became the 'go-to' person in her department, as, for her, no problem is big enough where she can't find a solution that satisfies everyone involved," says her nominator.

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*"When I wanted to take mechanical drafting in high school, I was told, 'It's a boys' course, you won't understand it,' and 'You won't be any good at it.' I took it anyway. Things have changed a lot since then. If she wants a career where she can be creative, reach her full potential and never be bored, she will find it in manufacturing. The manufacturing industry is always changing, with constant advances in technology, new things to learn and new challenges around the next corner."*



### **Christie Williams**

**Corporate Marketing Manager  
Beckwood Press Co.  
Fenton, MO**

Christie has developed a strategy for, and executed, the rebranding of both Beckwood Press and its Triform line of presses. From organizing consistent messaging across multiple communication channels, to designing sales literature and marketing collateral, her efforts have significantly elevated Beckwood's brand image within the industry. Her role in redesigning Beckwood's website in 2016 was crucial to improving user experience.

Christie also is responsible for managing Beckwood's presence at manufacturing trade shows, including FABTECH, and has exceeded company expectations in booth design, public-relations messaging and overall coordination of Beckwood's attendance at tradeshow. Additionally, Christie was named a Champion of PR by *PR Week* magazine in 2017 because of her design and communication skills, as well as her leadership in the custom-equipment-manufacturing industry.

"Never satisfied with the status quo," says her nominator, "she continues to redefine how marketing is perceived and executed in the metalforming industry."

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*"Manufacturing has offered me countless opportunities to showcase my design skills, apply critical thinking to solve complex problems, expand my technical knowledge and contribute to improving our corporate culture. I love working with cross-functional teams and watching our ideas come to life. Collaboration and innovation are vital, and complacency isn't an option."*



### **Jody Williams**

**Vice President of Business  
Development  
Genesee Global Group  
Rochester, NY**

During her 16 years with the company, Jody has progressed from an administrative position in finance to a senior sales position as vice president of business development. An 18-year industry veteran, Jody has worked at cultivating productive working relationships with clients while developing strong communication skills.

"Jody is a company leader and has had a profound impact on the strategic direction of the company," says her nominator. "Customers count on her to assist in solving complex problems. She has the ability to understand customer needs, provide a solution, and then support the customer throughout the entire process. And, her input has enabled continued growth for both the company and its employees."

Away from the job, Jody channels her passion for excellence in helping young girls develop confidence and leadership skills through cheerleading.

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*"In general, women bring a different dimension to problem solving and business development. As an advocate of developing confidence and leadership in young women, I hope to instill in them that women can be successful in any field that they desire. A career in manufacturing can be extremely rewarding, and often can change the dynamics of a business and possibly an industry."*

**Dhanwantie Prashad**

*President and Chief Executive Officer  
Risa Management Corp.  
Maspeth, NY*

Dhanwantie has spent 35 years serving in the manufacturing industry, including 25 years with Risa Management. Born in Guiana, she moved to New York and raised two boys while taking care of her mother, according to her nominator. Through all of this, she developed and has run a successful steel-fabrication company.

“Dhanwantie is a woman that has worked really hard both personally and professionally to get to where she is today,” says her nominator. “She has a big heart and will do anything for anyone. She certainly deserves to be acknowledged.”

**MF**



**Women in Manufacturing Association Focused on Encouragement, Engagement**

The Women in Manufacturing Association (WiM), with more than 1500 members, is a national association dedicated to supporting, promoting and inspiring women who have chosen a career in the manufacturing industry. The group encourages the engagement of women who want to share perspectives, gain cutting-edge manufacturing information, improve leadership and communication skills, participate in sponsoring programs, and network with peers.

WiM encompasses manufacturers of all types and welcomes individuals from every job function—from production to the C-suite—and is inclusive to men. Members benefit from exclusive access to regional and national programming, networking opportunities, bimonthly professional-development webinars, a customized employment tool called WiMWorks, online discussion communities, the quarterly IMPACT e-newsletter, and a robust searchable directory.

For more, visit [www.womenin-manufacturing.org](http://www.womenin-manufacturing.org).

**2018 Women of Excellence Honorable Mention**

**Yesenia Olivares**  
*Office Manager/Purchasing  
Osynergy  
Edinburg, TX*

**Laurie Hansel**  
*Director of Finance/  
Information Technology  
Muza Metal Products  
Oshkosh, WI*

**Diane Wyss**  
*Account Manager/Product  
Consultant  
Olsen Manufacturing Co. Inc.  
Royal Oak, MI*

**Virginia Lummus**  
*Controller  
Mills Specialty Metals  
Marietta, GA*

**Toledo Integrated Systems**  
**Toledo Transducers, Inc.**  
*One Source, One Solution*

- Tonnage Monitors
- Press Controls
- Load Cells

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