

TOP 25 WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Experience is the best teacher



Kristin Dempsey O'Donnell, vice-president of Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply, Inc., feels that being in the "minority" can be a great advantage.

"It can seem intimidating to be a woman in a male-dominated industry, however, if you perform well and participate fully, you'll be recognized and appreciated and groups will seek you out - and that will give you great exposure, learning and networking opportunities," she said.

Her primary responsibilities include sales and marketing for Dempsey, which offers rental uniforms, linens and floor mats. "Customers choose Dempsey because of its innovative use of technology, like RFID uniform tracking, handheld computers and a GPS-driven delivery systems that solves common service problems and controls costs," she said.

Working closely with Dempsey's corporate sales

manager, Mark Lewis, she oversees the company's sales force, including hiring, training and employee productivity. She is also responsible for the company's marketing efforts.

The company, celebrating 50 years in business, obtained a new location in Baltimore, a Green Business of the Year award and a Best Places to Work in Pennsylvania Award in 2009. The purchase in Maryland opened up the Baltimore-Washington metro market.

Since Dempsey is a family-owned business, she and her brother PJ (president) and her father, Patrick, (CEO), work closely on all decisions, such as employee benefits and acquisition financing.

She graduated from Princeton with a degree in engineering and operations research. Enrolled in a joint JD-MBA program, she cut the program short to return to the family business when it acquired its first remote location in 1994, which she ran for five years. She considers that the best education she ever received.

"Making mistakes is the best way to learn," she said. After leaving that facility in the hands of her brother, PJ, Kristin returned to Scranton and moved her focus from operations to sales and marketing.

Married to Thomas O'Donnell, who is employed by the U.S. Justice Dept., the couple has a daughter and another child on the way. In true small-town fashion, Tom and Kristin became friends in kindergarten and waited 30 more years to get married.