

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATHY BERGREN SMITH



TRAILBLAZERS

BY KATHY BERGREN SMITH

A NEW GENERATION IS PROVING THAT WOMEN CAN EXCEL IN ALL AREAS OF MARITIME TRANSPORTATION. HOW ARE THEY ACHIEVING SUCCESS? BY OUTWORKING THE COMPETITION, OPENING THEIR OWN BUSINESSES, SERVING AS ROLE MODELS AND DEMANDING THEY BE GIVEN THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES AS MEN.

DIANA GOSNELL

Immigration and Naturalization Service

Deep inside a warren of secure offices beneath the International Pier at Baltimore Washington International Airport Diana Gosnell is charged with manning the front lines of Homeland Security. As the INS Port Director for Baltimore, Gosnell and her 16 officers are responsible for verifying the documentation of all international arrivals in Maryland. From a maritime perspective that means boarding and inspecting each and every vessel coming in from foreign waters the moment it arrives at its berth. INS must also board any coastwise vessels which may have detained crew members aboard. Last year, Gosnell's team inspected 764 vessels, checking the documents of all the crews and passengers.

A diminutive woman with an impish grin, Gosnell is a welcoming face to foreigners traveling through Baltimore. But she also has a very keen eye for fraud. "Ninety-nine percent of the people are exactly who they say they are; it's our job to detect the others," says Gosnell. Her observational skills were honed far from her native Maryland, on the U.S.-Mexico border in Laredo, TX, where she worked as an immigration inspector. "It was very much a male-dominated occupation at that time," recalls Gosnell, but she felt very comfortable in Laredo picking up some Tex-Mex culture and language. She says that INS is an extremely people-oriented organization. "Laredo was an excellent training ground for me."

Gosnell encourages her inspectors to share their knowledge and experiences. "We learn from each other; if one of the officers encounters a counterfeit passport, we all study it together," she says. Learning to pick out "look-alikes" — impostors whose documents are in order — sometimes requires taking a snapshot and comparing the photos rather than the people. "You have to study the face, the ears, the chin; it can be very difficult, but you develop an eye for it."

Gosnell's commitment to her work is complete. She



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lives near the airport in Severn and keeps a cell phone at her side at all times. Ships arriving throughout the night need to be boarded and Gosnell must be available if one of the inspectors has a question. In today's state of heightened security, Gosnell is extremely busy implementing measures to further protect the border.

To that end, INS is no longer under the Department of Justice but part of the new Department of Homeland Security. Gosnell, after over 20 years with the Immigration Service, is looking forward to exciting times in her agency.

"I attended a meeting at headquarters last week with all the port directors from across the country, and we all feel that this is going to be very beneficial for all of our federal inspectors," she says.

As a woman in a leadership role, Gosnell is a role model for her two (soon to be three) female inspectors, "The ladies shine in this job, especially in fraud detection," she says.

CAROL KUCHTA

Landstar Gemini

Carol Kuchta has little time for sailing these days. As the principal agent for Landstar Gemini in Baltimore, her company Go-Rilla Enterprises, Inc., is thriving. There was a time, however, that Kuchta competed on a national level, sailing with three other women to the championships in Newport, RI. “We missed first place by 28 seconds,” Kuchta remembers.

Kuchta applies the same intensity to her business that she used to get to the championships. As a transportation service provider, Go-Rilla Enterprises provides inland transportation for cargo coming to or leaving the Port of Baltimore to the continental U.S, as well as Canada and Mexico. In the last quarter of 2002, Go-Rilla was one of the top five producing agents for Landstar Gemini. “I think it is the competitive aspect of it that appeals to me,” says Kuchta. “Like sailing, there is a lot of strategy, it’s definitely a brain game.”

The decision to become an agent came to Kuchta when she experienced a classic “glass ceiling” moment. A native Baltimorean, she had returned home after studying art in New York City. She found work with a motor carrier in sales and found herself a career. “I really enjoyed selling transportation services; I don’t like being chained to a desk.” Although there were few women in her work world, Kuchta says she never felt it was an obstacle ... until her company was sold to a family business operated by a father and two sons. “It only took a couple of months to realize that there would be little opportunity for me within the new company.”

So, in 1982, Go-Rilla Enterprises was formed, the business’s moniker derived from Kuchta’s sailing days. She had been on a crew of four women, two of whom were named “Carol.” The captain needed a way to distinguish the two. Kuchta’s job on the boat is known in racing circles as a “halyard gorilla.” “I said, ‘I am not going to be called ‘Gorilla,’ so the captain said, ‘How about



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Rilla?’ and ever since, I have been known as Rilla among my sailor friends,” says Kuchta. While looking for a business name she decided that for a transportation service provider “Go” was a good prefix to “Rilla.”

“I think constant change is the secret of my success,” says Kuchta. As times have changed she has adapted. “If you don’t make changes, you will get stuck,” she says bluntly. Kuchta has gone from running her own trucks from the railroad to the Port, to logistics agent, to becoming an agent for Gemini, the Landstar division devoted to intermodal and international freight. When she turned her focus to Landstar Gemini in 1999, she did so with just one account. Today, with three full-time employees and one half-timer, Go-Rilla is handling anywhere from 10 to 30 dispatches a day, sending trucks all over North America. From competitive sailboat racer to successful entrepreneur ... You go, Rilla!

NORA BARKER

IAN International

Back in 1967, Nora Barker answered an ad in the paper for a secretarial position close to home. She found herself working for the largest container shipping company in the world as secretary to the sales manager. In those days, she was expected to get coffee for her boss and keep her mouth shut.

But Barker, a sharp-witted businesswoman who has an easy way with people, was a natural for sales herself. Today she holds the position of Sales Manager for IAN International. She clearly remembers the day when she finally convinced her superiors to give her a chance at sales. "I went to my boss and I said, 'It's my turn!'"

As a secretary Barker learned all aspects of shipping. "Sea-Land was the greatest training ground there could be for maritime," she recalls fondly. She knew she was competent to go out and sell, but that would have been unheard of for a woman in the early '70s. "Remember," Barker says, "this was the era of the three-hour lunch 'with the boys.' I was training all of these young guys straight out of college who didn't have a clue about shipping."

One day, when she was fed up with helping out the salesmen, a young male recruit came to her in tears. She helped him and, in gratitude, he brought her flowers. That's when she knew she wanted more. She was finally given a chance to sell freight forwarding, an area in which she was able to flex her sales muscle.

Reflecting on her career path, Barker says, "the wonderful people I have met in 36 years in the maritime industry have all influenced me." She is a firm believer that the more contacts one has, the more opportunities arise. She admires the straight-talking style of Helen Bentley, her role model, "She tells it like it is and people listen." Olga Ennis, another mentor and director of the McCormick Company, will retire this year. Barker will miss her. "She was a customer that turned into a lifelong friend."



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Today, Barker sells the total shipping/forwarding package for IAN. She brings to the innovative company her vast experience with all aspects of shipping, freight, trucking and logistics. "IAN has given me the freedom to help them accomplish their vision," Barker says. ↴