

IN THE LINE OF DUTY



The Deal-Maker

Terri Rann's family business was transformed when she merged with a competitor in the Seattle area

Master Pools of Washington has been a family-owned business since 1954 when my father, Dale Cameron, began building swimming pools. He and my mother, Helen, committed their lives to it. He was also instrumental in developing the Master Pools Guild, and many other aspects of the industry.

As a result, I literally grew up in the business. I started working for my father in 1974 at the age of 16. I did the bookkeeping, ran our retail store and helped manage the office.

When my father passed away in fall 1998, it was completely unexpected. I was forced to make a drastic decision: Keep the family business that was now so successful, or sell it to strangers? I chose to buy the company from my remaining parent.

I was 40 years old at the time. Prior to these events, I only had office experience. Now I was weighed down by great financial burden and the enormous task of owning my parents' business.

TERRI RANN

Owner/President

Master Pools of Washington

Mountlake Terrace, Wash.

MASTER POOLS

Custom
Pools and Spas

"Standard of Excellence Since 1954"



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With the help of employees and members of the Master Pools Guild, I managed to get through those troubled times. The Guild, in particular, gave me the personal, professional and educational support that I needed to take over the family business.

Our retail store was operating fine, but our risk — and future — centered around the construction department. I held weekly meetings with key employees to monitor all jobs. By paying attention to details, paperwork and numbers, I started to get control of the

operation. Still, I relied heavily on the staff.

I had a tough time at first. It was difficult being a woman in a male-dominated industry. However, I gradually felt like the business was prospering under my direction.

Just as everything seemed to be falling into place, two important, longtime employees left in 2004. I was devastated. The loss of their expertise and leadership created a huge void. Initially, I was overcome by fear. But I didn't want to end what my father had built, and what had become a major personal

and financial commitment in my life.

I called a good family friend named Frank Eagle, who was also the owner of a competing firm, Pacific Pools of Kirkland, Wash.

His aid changed my situation. Eventually, we agreed to merge Pacific Pools' assets, staff and management with Master Pools of Washington. What began as tumultuous circumstances led to a merger that transformed my family company into the largest pool construction and service firm in western Washington.

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When I took charge, our firm had 12 employees; now it has 24. Frank has become general manager of operations. After the merger, sales increased 30 percent.

I love being in the pool business. I still experience some fear on occasion when trouble strikes, but I don't plan on ever leaving. ■

— as told to Katherine Wang



A big deal: When Frank Eagle and Terri Rann joined forces, the result was the largest pool construction and service company in western Washington.



Lessons Learned

■ Don't allow yourself to be dominated by fear. You need to move forward and get things done.

■ It's difficult to be a minority, but a woman can be a leader in a male-dominated industry.

■ Good things can happen if you are firmly committed to your goals.

