

family value | third-generation ceiling business still cresting



DeGeorge Ceilings president Angela Black: "Having an interior design education opened the door for me to help my mother full time with the daily operations after the unexpected passing of my father."

clients are sometimes still surprised when they see two knowledgeable women at the company helm.

The business specializes in drop and suspended ceilings and also installs hard-to-find tin, wood planks and decorative tiles. Commercial work — now the majority of DeGeorge's business, although Black notes that work with homebuilders is on the upturn — includes schools, restaurants, hotels, and office buildings. When it comes to residential work, DeGeorge Ceilings is known for being rec and theater room ceiling specialists.

“WE STRIVED TO HIRE AND MAINTAIN LIKE-MINDED INDIVIDUALS THAT WE HAVE ADOPTED INTO THE DEGEORGE CEILINGS FAMILY.”

BY APRIL MILLER
PHOTO BY DOUG KHRENOVSKY

Angela Black jokes that ceilings are in her DNA. The president of the third-generation, family-owned DeGeorge Ceiling Co. recalls a childhood filled with many dinner discussions that revolved around the business affairs of the company—owned at the time by her parents, Harold and Angela Zonneville.

Black's parents were carrying on the work begun by her maternal grandfather, Daniel DeGeorge. It was 63 years ago that Daniel and his four brothers founded the company. Her grandfather was instrumental in getting suspended ceilings started and, in what Black says is a little-known fact, is the “first generation of DeGeorge Ceilings helped Armstrong get started with a national ceiling tile division.”

While all seven of the Zonneville children (Black is the youngest) worked in the business at one time or another, today she is the sole family member carrying on her grandfather's legacy. Her path to company president began while she was studying interior design—“Isn't it amazing,” Black says, “that ceilings fall under the umbrella of interior design?”—at the University of Akron, and her parents asked her to work part-time at the business. “Having an interior design education opened the door for me to help my mother full time with the daily operations after the unexpected passing of my father,” she says.

A shared set of business values and ethics helped Black and her mother work closely together until Zonneville's retirement three years ago. “We strived to hire and maintain like-minded individuals that we have adopted into the DeGeorge Ceilings family with the same attention to detail and work ethic,” Black says. One of the “adopted” family members is Vice President Becky Boylen who has been with the company for 17 years. In a male-dominated field,

Black's days can be spent meeting with building contractors, conducting site inspections or sourcing unique products. Since ceilings are often the final phase of a project, a big challenge is the often extremely tight schedule. Pop in unexpectedly, and you might even find the company president on a ladder. “Last year business was picking up, so Becky and I were on ladders installing tile,” she says. “I had never done that before, but we needed to get the job moving, so we did it.”

Clients often tell her they appreciate the choice of options. “I think being females,” Black adds, “we listen differently and we don't push decisions on clients but give them choices.”

The respect that she and Boylen have in the industry has been earned one client at a time. “But once we have it, we have their loyalty,” Black says. “We have a lot of loyal customers.” ■

For more information: degeorgeforyou.com