

An Unexpected Turn

Contractor finds a fit for her talents in the concrete polishing industry



When Cori Sutton graduated from college with a degree in accounting, she didn't plan on working for her father's concrete construction company, let alone run a construction business of her own. But since 2003, Sutton has worked for her father at Maya Brothers, Inc., Erie, Pa., in estimating and overseeing the office and accounting departments. In the summer of 2010, Sutton stepped into another unexpected role — president of the newly formed concrete polishing firm Diamond Designer Concrete, Inc.

Maya Brothers was working on the structural concrete elements at an expansion project for the Erie Art Museum when it found itself down a concrete polishing subcontractor. "I had experience in polished concrete through work on the countertops in my kitchen and bathroom and other projects. I could never wrap my mind around the precast forming portion of those jobs, but I was really good at polishing them. I applied that knowledge to floors and we had a business," Sutton recalls.

That first project at the Erie Art Museum was a challenge for Sutton. "I understood the basic gist of polishing, but had not fully developed those skills for floors. So I got educated," she says.

Sutton reached out to concrete polishing equipment and products supplier Niagara Machine, which is headquartered in her hometown. The distributor supplied Sutton with the equipment she needed to complete the project and taught her how to use

Cori Sutton, president of Diamond Designer Concrete, Inc. of Erie, Pa., used her experience polishing concrete countertops as a springboard for her floor polishing business.



the grinding machines and chemicals.

In addition to having to learn a new industry and its equipment and chemicals, Sutton found the museum project itself posed challenges. The floor in the museum's gallery had three massive spinning walls, which she says were "interesting" to polish and apply chemicals around. None of it deterred Sutton. "The funny thing is when everyone else was frustrated and worn out at the Erie Art Museum and probably never wanted to see a grinder, or a piece of concrete dust for that matter, I was already wishing I could get more work," she says.

Sutton plans to work double-duty for now, staying involved with her father's company while working to grow the polishing business. With the concrete polishing market still emerging, the current economic situation, and the eventual succession of Maya Brothers to Sutton and her brother, she has no idea what the future will bring but she does know she will be involved with polishing concrete.

Why join the CPAA?

Sutton found the CPAA during her initial research into the polishing industry. She was drawn to the

group's willingness to share ideas and help educate everyone involved in a polished concrete project. "What the CPAA is promoting in the industry is admirable — people working together for the industry," she says.

Sutton acquired her CPAA Tradesman Accreditation in January, and she is signed up to complete the Craftsman Accreditation in April. "My goal is to complete the Master Craftsman training," she says, and will be working on getting enough projects under her belt to do so.

Even with her fairly recent involvement with the CPAA, Sutton has already experienced the benefits of membership beyond the training and technical support. "I was recently in a client's office discussing an upcoming polishing project," Sutton explains. "They knew I was new to the industry and didn't have a lot of experience, but when I told them I was getting training and accreditation through the CPAA their eyes lit up. My involvement with the association played a part in me getting that job."

Like a lot of concrete polishers, Sutton feels at home with polishing. "I just get it," she says. "Polishing clicks with me, and I love it. And I don't have to do formwork." ●