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MANUFACTURERS CORNER

# ARM-R-LITE...

## ... Strong Name, Products and People

In early October I traveled to South Plainfield, New Jersey to visit with Shannon McGrady, Vice President and Key Accounts Manager, Arm-R-Lite. Shannon served on the IDA Board of Directors from 1997 to 1999 and as an IDA Vice President in 1998. Spending time with her was more like visiting with a dear friend, than a business associate. But, then, if you've ever done business with her, I'm sure you, too, experienced the same warm, caring personality that she so contagiously projects.

After talking about family, friends, and life in general, Shannon and I focused on the creation, maturation, and current status of Arm-R-Lite, a company her step-father, Jack Dourney, Jr., began back in 1958. She shared that Jack is now 85 years of age and still enjoys playing golf. As a former Minor League baseball player, he maintains much of his athletic abilities which keep him younger than his years. After his baseball career ended, he joined the army serving during WW II.

Following World War II, and his service in Japan, Jack entered the garage door business as a door dealer in West Orange, New Jersey. The year was 1948. According to Shannon, Jack was quite the businessman, and actu-

ally got into the door business as the result of purchasing a number of wood garage doors at a discounted price. He saw an opportunity, took advantage of it, and never looked back.

Like many entrepreneurs, he found that he wasn't totally satisfied with his product suppliers. Unlike others, he did something about it by developing his own supply source. Mr. Dourney started Arm-R-Lite to provide products for his door dealer business.

According to Shannon, one of his product concerns dealt with strength. Mr. Dourney developed a sectional door utilizing welded connections, and liked the end result. As a matter of fact, the product strength was so impressive to him that he used a

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### Arm-R-Lite: founders Jack and his wife, Wilma McGrady Dourney

Knight's head as the company icon. This symbol of strength remains to this day, and is a critical component of the company name, the products it manufactures, and the people who produce them. It was interesting to me that the aluminum product was welded as I didn't know aluminum could be welded. Of course, it can and it is still the preferred method of Arm-R-Lite as compared to a bolted connection.

It was in the late '50s when a number of gasoline service stations were being constructed in New Jersey. The gasoline companies needed a light-weight, but strong sectional door for their stations, and sought out Jack for a solution. Again, opportunity came knocking, and Jack's entrepreneurial spirit was fired up. He responded by inventing a strong, rust-resistant, sectional door to meet the demand. What he didn't have from a formal engineering background, he had in the form of a gift. As Shannon put it, "He had an eye for what was needed...a vision one might say." As a



note of interest, Jack single-handedly designed his own dies for the new product and these same dies are being utilized nearly sixty years later.

By this time, installation of products was way too much for the booming new manufacturing company to handle, and manufacturing became the sole function. Jack's father, a retired military man came on board the company and served as organization manager. His contribution to the company helped significantly, and his footprint still remains today. As a matter of fact, the product serial number system used today was created by him. Any product sold by Arm-R-Lite since 1958 using these serial numbers can be traced

back to its manufacturing date and specifications. Dealers servicing one of these doors only need to provide the company with the serial number and they can virtually replicate the product as precisely as it was originally produced.

What products do the company manufacture today? Although the core product remains basically the same, the product line is certainly much more diversified from what it was back in 1958 and includes: most all sectional, commercial and residential applications, steel, aluminum and glass, fiberglass, pass doors (doors within overhead doors), and entrance

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doors to match both custom and standard. With the aluminum and glass product, the company can now provide a one-inch insulated glass unit. More and more homeowners are using these doors to open up their homes in the spring and summer. They actually have the door installed in a living room so they can literally get next to nature.

As a side note, if you drive past their manufacturing facilities, virtually all their door products are on display... an impressive sight for us door people! And, it makes quite a statement within their local community for sure.

Jack remained with the company until 1991 when he retired. His wife, Wilma McGrady Dourney was named President. Wilma actually joined the firm in 1987 as Vice President of Sales and Marketing following extensive experience as an executive in another industry. Following graduation from Belmont University with a degree in

business, Shannon became an integral part of the Arm-R-Lite management team in 1988. Today, the company is highly recognized as a leading business in New Jersey...a business that is lead by two very capable, business women.

When I asked Shannon how important door dealers were to the success of Arm-R-Lite, she didn't hesitate and responded with one word, "extremely". With the improvements in shipping, and packaging methods, the company now does business in all 50 states. Speaking of dealers and customers, a sign in the front office of the company reads, "It takes years to acquire a customer, but only seconds to lose one." From my observation, there certainly is no question about the importance of door dealer customers to the people of Arm-R-Lite.

Like all in the manufacturing sector, the global economy has impacted the company significantly: "We had to react

rapidly to the volatile price changes in raw materials, staffing, and personnel needs," stated Shannon. "We became a lean, mean machine," she asserted. She emphasized the fact that by being a small, family-owned business they were able to react more quickly than others. However, as she does so effectively, Shannon didn't dwell on the negative aspects of the economy, but rather focused on some positive ones. "As I look around me, and as the impact that a down economy brings to many people becomes more and more vivid, I realize how very lucky I am to have what I have," she stated. "It might not be a lot to some, but to me I'm very fortunate and it's not that I didn't realize this before, but now I think about it every hour of every day," she added.

In regard to others, it was meaningful to me that Shannon expressed concern for those who may not be as fortunate. She shared that no one really

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knows the situation behind individuals with whom they may be dealing. At Arm-R-Lite, people have been asked to be more patient with customers, to be more understanding, and to take the high road. People have also been asked to be more considerate and have a little more empathy for others who they meet on a daily basis, at the grocery, on the street, and elsewhere. "It doesn't cost anyone anything to treat people like people, but it is the greatest gift we can give them," she shared.

I was interested in what Shannon considered the reasons for her personal success as a business leader. Among her reasons, these were perhaps the most revealing: She had the support from her parents, family, and friends. A great education at a quality university provided a foundation from which to build a future. On-the-job training taught her that people are the main focus of life... at home and at work. She added to all of this, "One must always remember to have fun and laugh a lot."

When I interview manufacturer executives for this publication, I normally ask if they would like to share a comment or two with the readers; especially door dealers. Shannon didn't need any more than the opportunity to do so. In summary, here's what she shared with me:

- With commercial jobs especially, I would like to see more door dealers treat the products they sell as custom products like other industries do. This will enable them to get deposits for shop drawings, progress payments, etc. and will allow them to be paid in full when they show up on the job (with the exception of labor). If labor is 10% of a job, dealers would be able to be 90% paid when arriving on the project. Wouldn't this be a significant industry standard!
- Our industry's products are truly custom made. Think about it. A 10x10 may be a standard size door, but every track is made specific to fit each building. It may be as subtle as masonry jambs versus wood jambs, but is not grabbed off the shelf. By

changing a mindset of general contractors, it would allow for better cash flow for door dealers and also lower their risk.

- More dealers should sell quality and not price. When people say it is too much money, what they really mean is tell me why this costs more.
- Dealers should never undervalue the worth of their services.
- Help promote lien laws in every state.

I asked Shannon what the future would be regarding the product line of Arm-R-Lite. She excitingly shared that already the company was producing enhanced energy conservation doors, doors with glass that can be shipped from the factory in place, and doors with spans up to 34 feet. Although the

larger, insulated, aluminum doors are no longer as light as before, they remain lighter than other comparable types using different materials.

During the conclusion of our interview, Shannon and I did a bit of reminiscing and focused our thoughts and conversation on the people who comprise our industry. We identified a number of IDA leaders who remain active in the industry, and others who are not, and acknowledged the positive impact they have made on our industry and to us personally. As she so thoughtfully and accurately stated, "We are truly blessed to be a part of the door and access systems industry, and the International Door Association."

 IDA



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