

Husband-Wife Team Beats the Odds

Northeast Rebuilders Adapt to Succeed

By Traci Matt
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Rebuilders Christine and Pat D'Angelo have defied the odds. Not only have they been married for more than three decades, but the duo has worked side by side since 1983 at their business, All-Start Rebuilders Company, located in the Boston suburb of Saugus, Mass.

"Most men who hear this state that they wouldn't last five minutes working full-time with their wives," Christine said. "Pat's favorite reply to these skeptics is 'behind every successful man is an exhausted woman.'"

The All-Start story began, like many rebuilding stories, in a basement.

"That was back in the good old days when you could build about 18 units and cover about 75 percent of the cars, vans and small trucks on the road," said Christine.

After about 18 months, they rented space above an auto body shop in an antique barn that was built to house horse-drawn fire wagons. They began putting automotive and marine units (they are located near a large lobster fleet) on consignment in local garages using the "honor system." Then in 1992 they purchased the 2,700-square-foot facility which remains the All-Start headquarters today.

At their peak, the D'Angelos employed four other rebuilders and Christine did office work and deliveries while raising their two children, Michael and Michelle. The children, now grown, worked in the business as teens but then chose different careers.

"Then came the onslaught of foreign import cars, and the variety of units and parts needed was staggering. We were fortunate to be within a half-hour driving distance to Boston Auto Electric for most anything we needed," said Christine. "I would sometimes make two or three trips a day picking up parts, while our guys were stripping, cleaning and blasting units so that we could com-

pete with the large, stocking national auto parts chain stores that were quickly flooding the market with inexpensive mass-produced import units.

"When it became evident that it was virtually impossible to supply units for the vast number of makes and models now required, we shifted our emphasis to heavy duty and industrial which required less variety—at least up until now—and less manpower."

For the past five years, to the surprise of most customers, Christine has occupied her own bench at All-Start, rebuilding "anything from a 3G to a 33SI or any foreign industrial unit."

"Pat gave me a shiny new 3/8 drive air impact gun for my last birthday," she said. "We love to go shopping together for tools at Sears."

She gets a "kick" out of the surprised looks when customers find all five feet,

two inches of her at the lathe cutting slip rings or installing a pulley using the air impact gun in one hand and gripping the pulley with the other hand.

"Men are usually quick to try to chivalrously hold down the alternator as a protective gesture," she said.

All-Start has evolved into a two-person "mom and pop" business servicing mostly fleet accounts with the flexible use of part-time help when needed. Their emphasis is on reselling built and boxed units, custom rebuilding, and a face-to-face approach with customers.

"We enjoy going on the road together and delivering to accounts, which is a more personal touch in this fast-moving, impersonal world of computers, e-mails, voice mail and endless telephone menu selections which are typical of many industries today," said Christine.

At the "coaxing" of Dan Smith,



All-Start co-owner Christine D'Angelo (R), the exhausted woman behind her successful husband, Pat (L).



Boston Auto Electric sales manager and Electrical Rebuilder's Association (ERA) vice president, Pat and Christine joined the ERA while attending the tech ed seminar in September.

"We were truly blessed when we met Dan at an Ace seminar some 20 years ago," said Pat. "He quickly became a friend, mentor and unbelievable source and wealth of information, be it technical advice, sourcing out parts, or what's new in the industry, while always ending our telephone conversations with one of his endless supply of jokes,"

According to Christine, they are already profiting from ERA membership: "We're beginning to benefit from all the sources of information and combined experience available through the various forums they offer. Looking to the future, and the complex systems which are here now and on the horizon, I think that to survive we'll all have to rely more heavily on helping each other."