

# HEATHER LEE MEIXEL

Owner and president, Bamar Plastics Inc.

By Jim Johnson  
Plastics News Staff

For Heather Lee Meixel, working in the family injection molding business was never really an option for many years.

But that's exactly where she is these days as owner and president of Bamar Plastics Inc. of South Bend, Ind. And she actually spent 25 years in the manufacturing sector in preparation for a job she says she loves and never really considered until her father, Barry Lee, passed away a few years ago.

"Never once. Not one time," she said when asked if she ever thought about working at Bamar earlier in her career. Sure, she was there during college summers because she needed a job. But the long-term prospects were just not available. "Mostly because we weren't asked. And he had four capable children of basically passing the business down to. But he had no interest in that. He was kind of a lone wolf," Lee Meixel said.

When it came down to settling her father's estate, Lee Meixel ended up with the business and her

siblings retained ownership of the building. She found herself as the boss. And she was ready.

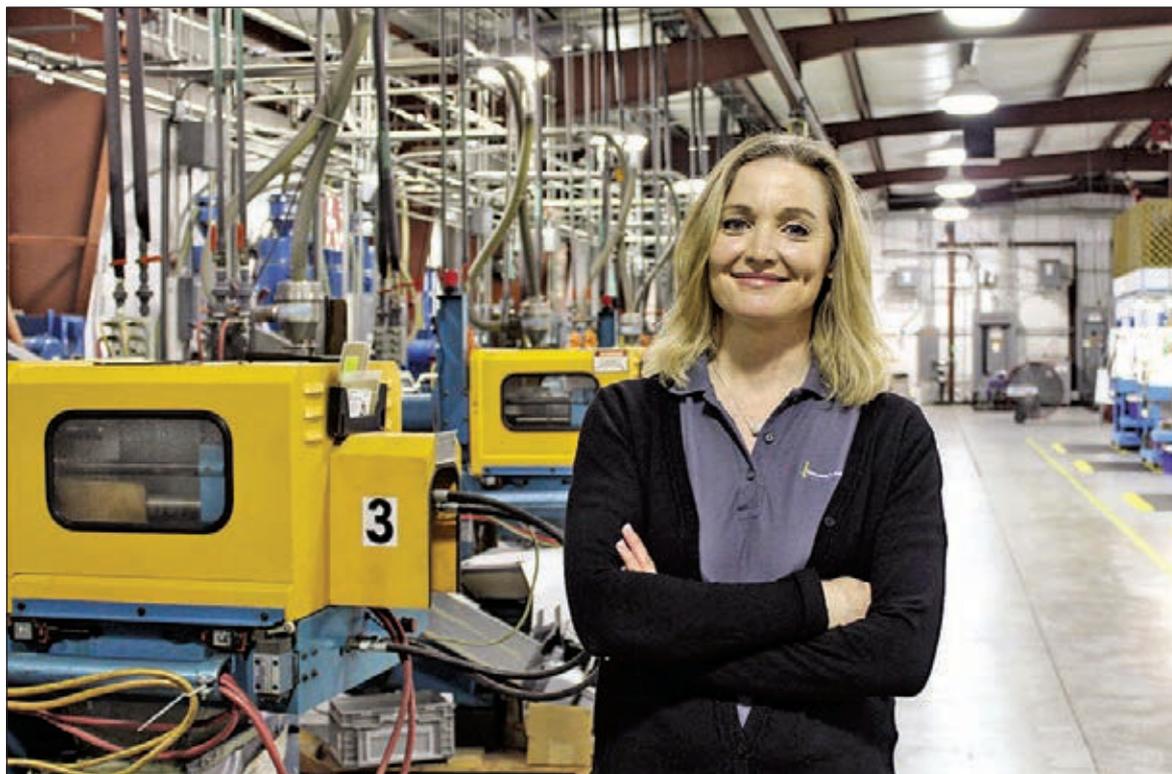
"I'm very glad that I've had the opportunity to work for some really good people. I've had a couple of mentors in my life that have been preparing me for this position without even knowing. When one of those doors opened, I walked through it," she said.

Even with all the experience in manufacturing, Lee Meixel points to one particular job she had in her 20s as one that helped her step in and take over leadership: restaurant management.

"That was probably one of the biggest preparations for this position right now, just being able to handle a lot of different things at one time, being able to handle people and understanding the business is really the people," she said.

Most of the 27 employees have been at Bamar for at least 20 years, some much longer. So when Lee Meixel stepped in, they supported her and helped with the ownership transition. "They have Bamar near and dear to their hearts," she said.

While Lee Meixel did not have the opportunity to work with her father



Heather Lee Meixel has been in the manufacturing sector for 25 years.

as an adult, she's opening that door for her two daughters. The teenagers, 17 and 19, are both working part time on the floor, learning the business from the ground up. "It does mean a lot to me. I want them to be ready," she said.

Lee Meixel said she knows she's a rare breed, a woman business leader. Especially a leader in manufacturing.

"Being a woman in a man's industry is nothing that I'm unfamiliar with. Just being in manufacturing

over the past 25 years I was very much unique," she said. "Sometimes when I'm in a room of people, it ends up being 500 men and me. So I've got to have a voice. In order to be heard, I've got to speak a little louder sometimes."

# LAURA CORREA

Coatings engineer, Continental Structural Plastics

By Catherine Kavanaugh  
Plastics News Staff

Coatings engineer Laura Correa had much to celebrate when she received her diploma from Kettering University in Flint, Mich., in 2016.

With her cap and gown, she wore a special cord and honors medal to signify she was graduating cum laude both in her overall class and in her major of chemistry.

She also had a job lined up at

Continental Structural Plastics, an Auburn Hills, Mich.-based auto supplier and composites specialist, where she did a two-year internship working under formulation chemists.

On top of the good grades and good job, Correa's graduation marked an important family milestone: She was the first person on her mother's side to earn a degree, she said in an email.

"I am a Latina woman, first in my family to graduate from college,"

Correa said. "I am breaking the mold, the stereotype that Latinas and women are incapable of working and producing good work."

Correa said her college experience at CSP was a career option eye-opener.

"I realized that plastics were so applicable to so many markets that are currently dominated by other materials," Correa said. "I am constantly surprised about all the different plastics and their properties and quirks."

She's particularly fascinated with combining and engineering materials.

"I believe composites are the future," Correa said, noting that the evolving technology reminds her of a quote attributed to the namesake of her alma mater, Charles Kettering. An inventor who held 196 patents and was the head of research for General Motors from 1920-47, Kettering once said: "My interest is in the future because I'm going to spend the rest of my life there."

New to the workforce, Correa is looking forward to the near future.

"I can say that a highlight of my career thus far is working with customers to support projects that I will one day see on the road," she said.

Correa's job involves a lot of testing, and the technical aspects of the work can be challenging.

"While I'm very good at understanding the theory behind what I do, I struggle in practice," she said. "I believe this is because I tend to be a perfectionist, but in experimental testing, little is perfect. In fact, most of the time, it is far from perfect."

Advice from her mother comes in handy.

"She told me to always learn. She said that could take many forms," Correa said. "It could be through education at a university, all the way to learning from a simple mis-

take."

Correa counts her mother and an aunt as mentors and Wonder Woman as her long-time favorite superhero.

"I look up to her because of how incredibly strong-willed she is, how independent she is, but most of all, how compassionate she is," Correa said of the comic and movie character. "She has the right balance of all of the attributes I find to be necessary in a person."

Correa has some distinguishing personal attributes, too, that she

hopes inspire others, especially younger relatives.

"Since I'm the first in my family to graduate, I am helping my family excel and encouraging my nephew to excel as well," she said.

Correa also represents CSP and the field of science, technology, engineering and math in outreach programs with students.

"There is little that gives me more happiness than being able to encourage future generations to work hard and that there are no limits to success," she said.

Photo courtesy Laura Correa



Laura Correa was the first person on her mother's side to earn a college degree.

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