

DIRECTOR SPOTLIGHT

RETIREES

KIC'S MB (MARYBETH) ALLEN LOOKS BACK ON HER TWO DECADES WITH THE COMPANY

BY SMT TODAY EDITOR



Based in San Diego, KIC is the industry leader in automated thermal process tools and systems for reflow, wave, curing and semiconductor thermal processes. The company pioneered the development of oven profilers and process optimization tools, and then worked to create the next generation of thermal management systems to help manufacturers improve the thermal process quality while reducing cost. MB (Marybeth) Allen has been a dedicated and valued part of the KIC family since 1999, spending decades leading its team with her technical expertise and sales experience. This, along with her work ethic, outstanding contributions, devotion to clients and many industry achievements have positioned MB as the face of KIC for many years. Now that MB has announced her retirement for early 2021, we spoke to her to find out more about her thoughts and experiences about both KIC and the industry, as well as what she plans for the future.

Q: MB, CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR UPCOMING RETIREMENT. WE UNDERSTAND YOU'VE BEEN WITH KIC FOR CLOSE TO 22 YEARS. WHAT ROLES HAVE YOU PLAYED WITHIN COMPANY?

A: My relationship with KIC is in fact even longer than that. I was KIC's first sales representative way back when KIC was still working out of the owner's garage back in the late 80's. It was very exciting because they had a product that no one else had that offered insight and control into the solder reflow process, our continuous monitoring system for solder reflow applications. I was Chapter President of the SMTA at the time and asked them to be a speaker several times. To this day there is still no company that has a product that is the same as ours, our Reflow Process Inspection - RPI. Then in 1999 I joined KIC as their North American Sales Manager. In 2004 I accepted the position as General Manager for EMEA and moved to Rome Italy, setting up our European office. I managed that territory for 6.5 years. That was an incredible experience and I am fortunate to have worked with some amazing people, and in several industries. In 2011 I returned home to San Diego and took on multiple roles. While back to managing sales I also took on a new position as Product Manager and later managing our Sales Administration Department as well. So, I've worn many hats and enjoyed all those positions.

Q: HOW WILL YOU HELP KIC TRANSITION FROM NOW UNTIL YOU RETIRE?

A: We really started the transition last year when we brought Karl Pfluke on board to manage our Eastern Region Sales. We were very fortunate to have Karl join us and bring his years of experience with solder materials and thermal knowledge. I've spent the last months training Karl on KIC's broad range of products and the applications for which they're used. Karl is now going to manage our sales team for the US and Canada. The transition is easy as he's a great fit to our team and provides top-notch service and support to our customers, sales reps and VAR partners. This change allows me to

focus on applications and technical writing and supporting the sales team's reorganization.

However, I will miss working directly with our customers, sales representatives and partners after so many years! That was the best part of my job and is the hardest part of my retirement.

Q: WE UNDERSTAND THAT KIC HAS A STRONG MANAGEMENT TEAM IN PLACE TO CONTINUE LEADING THE COMPANY AFTER YOUR RETIREMENT. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT IT?

A: KIC has always functioned with great autonomy for its managers. So essentially, we are all strong individuals with a broad range of experience and leadership skills. Most of our core



management team has been with KIC for 20+ years. Also, many of our employees have been with KIC 15-20+ years.

Therefore, there's a strong knowledge base and a fluid business environment and processes. While Phil Kazmierowicz is our President and leader, much of our strength and dedication comes from Casey Kazmierowicz, his father. He is a kind, soft spoken man with a huge heart and is the soul of the company. Casey always has a smile and makes sure he comes around to say hello to everyone. It has been my great fortune to have known and worked with him and the Kazmierowicz family for so many years.

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Q: IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST, SINGLE CHALLENGE FOR OUR INDUSTRY?

A: Surprisingly this answer changes by territory. The biggest challenge for our industry in the United States is keeping manufacturing in the US and growing it. You can travel around the country and see empty buildings, even full campuses where electronics manufacturers used to reside. When that business left the US and went to lower cost countries our industry suffered. Our talented and large scope of engineers, technicians, operators, sales and managers were hit hard, as was the economy in each of those areas. We keep hearing 'onshoring', yet it is certainly not happening at the speed that 'offshoring' did. I do, however, believe this will be a huge change that we will see in our industry in the very near future.

Q: HOW HAVE YOUR CUSTOMERS CHANGED AND EVOLVED OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS?

A: Technology has evolved at an incomprehensible pace and therefore our customers have done so as well. They must keep up with the technological changes to not only survive, but to prosper. I can remember when we transitioned to 'fine-pitch', 25mm from 50mm. That was painful for many companies. New equipment had to be procured, new processes, materials and of course tremendous learning. Now we can't even see some of the components, we transitioned to lead-free materials and PCBs are smaller than ever (and larger in some cases).

I think one of the biggest changes that took place was the focus on quality and the use of advanced technologies. We must continue to maintain the highest quality standards to be competitive, not just nationally but internationally. And we must use leading edge technology to attain high quality standards for the ever-evolving PCB and products that are being manufactured.

Q: HOW HAVE YOU HELPED KIC STAY CURRENT WITH THE CONSTANTLY EVOLVING TRENDS IN THERMAL PROCESS TOOLS?

A: Listening. Every customer has a challenge, every company has solutions. These solutions are constantly evolving. It's imperative that we know what our customers' problems are but also what solutions are fitting their requirements. We are not a 'stand-alone' product. KIC's products are used in reflow ovens, wave solder machines, selective soldering systems and in a



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multitude of applications. Therefore, we must listen to what equipment and materials these manufacturers provide and the problems the customers have so that we can always provide the most effective solutions to accompany those processes. We have always been a leader of these thermal tools and our communication with our VAR partners and others in the industry, along with our solid relationships with our customers,

have allowed us to remain a leader. An example is our work with the IPC CFX (Connected Factory Exchange) initiative. I was fortunate to be on that committee since the beginning. We are now coming to our next revision. The committee is comprised of companies worldwide of all sizes, all types of manufacturing and all with the goal to provide manufacturers easy, usable solutions for machine-to-machine communication and machine-to-Industry 4.0 data exchange. Having had the great fortune to work with such a diverse group of users and manufacturers, has allowed KIC to keep on top of this new and important trend.

Q: WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF; WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS OVER YOUR CAREER?

A: Two things; continued growth for my company and the people I've had the good fortune to meet. KIC started out in a garage with an ingenious invention and I'm happy to have been a significant part of their continued growth. What an amazing job I've had, being able to meet people in every aspect of the electronics manufacturing process, internationally. So much of what we use in life has electronics inside and I've met so many of those inventors and manufacturers. I've learned so much from each person I met, grown from the experiences and from the places I've been and have had so much fun for all these years. I should add a third success, still staying married after all the years of travel and crazy work hours.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES KIC DIDN'T HAVE TO FACE TWO DECADES AGO WHEN YOU WERE NEWLY ONBOARD THAT ARE COMMON NOW?

A: I don't have an answer for this one. Maybe global manufacturing, i.e. international communication, selling and shipping.

Q: WHERE DO YOU SEE THE INDUSTRY HEADING, ESPECIALLY WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC? HOW WILL IT CHANGE BUSINESS MOVING FORWARD, AND HOW WILL KIC ADAPT?

A: It was an eye-opening experience to have seen where our (the US's) weaknesses were in terms of product availability due to offshore manufacturing. We witnessed this as it related to the medical industry but now, we, the public, not just those of us in the industry, have now also seen how much more manufacturing we've lost. Countries in Europe had similar experiences. Our government has been trying to bring manufacturing back for these last few years and I see this as an easier task going forward. We will see an increase of onshoring as I mentioned earlier in our conversation.

Q: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE JUST STARING OUT IN THE ELECTRONICS MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY?

A: Speak with as many people as possible. Everyone you meet brings something new and different to the table. You can't learn everything on your own so draw on other's experience and knowledge. People typically like to share, and engineers are great teachers. Always be honest about what you don't know and be open to learning. And don't forget to share what you do learn so others can grow as well.

Q: AFTER YOU RETIRE, DO YOU SEE YOURSELF STAYING CONNECTED WITH KIC AS WELL AS THE INDUSTRY AT LARGE?

A: It has always been my plan to stay connected with KIC and the industry after my retirement. My husband has dreaded this time for years, that is me being home and not working. These last months working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic has given us a chance to get used to 'living together'. Marc Peo, President of Heller, has called it my 'practice run'. It's worked out great and I do believe that ultimately, I will find a balance between retirement and, hopefully, continued involvement in our industry. I'm not a good enough golfer to do that full time.

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