

Industry Trailblazer Betty Mullin Retires

Betty Mullin's stamp on the industry is long, memorable, and impressive. Not only is she one of the first (if not THE first) woman President/CEO in the gate and access industry, she was also one of the originators of wholesale distribution. Her remarkable success and longevity running Encon Electronics for the past 34 years is a testament to her vision, integrity, and worth ethic.

In 1976, Betty began working as an executive secretary for an installation company. For 8 years, she slowly transitioned up to the service and project management departments. During that time, their main supplier recognized the potential of broadening their product market. They proposed starting a new company devoted solely for wholesale distribution. They needed someone to step up and take the lead. A motivated and entrepreneurial Betty Mullin took this opportunity by storm. She mortgaged her house and launched one of the first dedicated distribution companies in Northern California.

The inception of Encon Electronics in 1984 cemented Betty as one of the founders of true distribution and even more groundbreaking, she became one of the first women to own a company in our industry. Being one of the first, was not easy according to Betty. "Most people who called in did not want to talk to me or have anything to do with me. They assumed I knew nothing simply because I was female."

Betty said "I was always completely honest. I would tell them, just give me a chance. If you are unhappy with anything, I completely understand you purchasing from someone else." Betty was able to convince most people to give her at least one chance, and that's all she needed to prove them wrong.

First, Betty recruited Joe Weber, one of the most knowledgeable technicians around, to help her launch the distribution business. Betty admits she would have never been successful if Joe had not agreed to join the company. "I am extremely grateful to him for taking that leap with me."

Joe recalls his bold decision to go work for her. "The bottom line is I believed in Betty. Her work ethic was unparalleled, and her word was her bond. If she said she had the parts or that a piece of equipment could do something, she made sure it did." Her integrity was what impressed Joe, and what proved to be the key component for building strong relationships with vendors and customers throughout her career.

The other factor that set Betty apart was she demanded and implemented one of the highest levels of quality control and customer service seen in the industry. She required that Encon only sell to licensed contractors. She refused to sell directly to end users regardless of how large the order, demonstrating her loyalty and concern for dealers. According to Weber, "Even in the age of online ordering and a difficult economy, Betty always cycled business back to the dealer network."

“She also insisted orders were processed right, that Encon’s warehouse was stocked with quality products, and most importantly, that all products shipped from Encon worked properly.”

Lawrence Bourke, one of her original employees and whom currently still works at Encon after 32 years, recalls “Betty insisted that every operator that came in was assembled and tested before we shipped it out to anyone. One time, I had to assemble and test twenty-two operators in one day,” Lawrence said.

Betty explained, “I wanted to make sure all the parts were there, and that every product we distributed worked. I did not want to give them any reason to order from somewhere else.” This was the beginning of Encon’s long and much deserved reputation for reliability.

Encon is also known in the industry for its pioneering stance on safety and again, that can be attributed to Betty. She insisted on selling sensing edges and safety devices long before the industry had UL325 requirements or ASTM guidelines. According to Betty, “A tragic death linked to a slide gate operator was being investigated at the time. After reviewing the incident, it was determined an edge could have prevented this tragedy. From then on, I made it mandatory. Every slide gate operator sold from Encon had to have a Miller Edge.”

Encon, and ultimately Betty, set a new safety precedent for the industry. At times, she even refused sales she deemed “unsafe” due to her strong principles. Shortly after, most companies in the industry adopted the safety policy originated by Betty.

In addition, Betty has always made training a priority. Betty said, “By properly training my techs and our dealers, we could increase the likelihood that fence and gate installations are being done correctly and safely. We’ve always offered manufacturer seminars and private, customized training for our dealers.”

Her dedication to educating dealers is unparalleled, and Encon continues to be at the forefront of training in our industry. When the CAGOI program began in 2007, Encon immediately got involved. Betty insisted that her entire technical and sales team take and pass the certification exam. Encon has demonstrated a strong commitment to educating dealers about the program by offering several certification exam opportunities for dealers.

Betty’s strongest legacy has been her loyalty and devotion to her customers and her employees. Her philosophy of putting the customer first has not wavered in 42 years. To this day, Encon does not have a voicemail system because Betty always wanted their customers to be welcomed by a live person.

Tim Nordstrom, Encon’s outside sales rep and someone who has worked for Betty for over 30 years said, “Betty never accepted excuses for upsetting a customer. If a customer had a complaint, she told me to make right. She also taught me to always look at the big picture. She would tell me, keeping a customer is more important than being right.” This focus on superior

customer service is something her employees quickly learned to adopt and that her customers truly appreciated.

Long-time customer, Steve Applebaum of Tholl Fence had plenty to say about his experiences with Betty over the years. “After speaking with Betty many times over the phone, I met her for the first time in 1984, shortly after she opened Encon Electronics. In my mind, the dynamic business person I had envisioned stood 6’ tall and was fully charged with ideas and solutions. To my surprise, the woman shaking my hand was of a smaller stature, but had even larger ideas and solutions than what I had ever anticipated. Her recurring words to me were how can we help you achieve your goals?”

“Betty’s commitment to her customers, her employees and to the manufacturers she represents has always been about truth, support, education and family. Because of these values, we are in our 34th year of doing business with Encon. She will be sorely missed, but the culture she’s developed at Encon lives-on with the fine men and women that will continue her legacy.”

Not surprising, Betty said, “When I’m retired, I’m going to miss talking with the customers and all the vendors that I’ve known forever. I loved getting to know them, hearing about their families, and just talking shop.”

Betty said, “I also loved working with my employees. So many of them have worked with me for many years. I am grateful that we were able to maintain a small, family environment even as our company and offices expanded.”

Nordstrom agreed, “Betty sincerely cares about the people that work for her. She always asks me how my kids and family are doing before she asks me about work. She also is an amazing judge of people. I truly believe the success of Encon is because of her ability to hire good people, and those people not wanting to work for anyone else.”

This appears to be true when evaluating how long most of Betty’s employees have been with her. The majority have worked at Encon for over a decade, some over twenty years, and a few over thirty! Considering there are 26 employees, this is a testament to Betty’s character and her generous and kind leadership style.

“I remember the first day I met Betty,” Bourke said. “She was very professional, and she had a friendly, easy presence that instantly made you feel comfortable. You knew she was a person of authority and you respected her, and at the same time, she was so down to earth.”

It’s not surprising Betty created a unique family environment based on her personal background. She has been married to her husband for 58 years. Pat has been her biggest advocate through every step of her journey at Encon. The support of their four children, Jeff, Joel, Jon, and Jennifer has also been a major factor to Betty’s longevity in the industry.

Employees are grateful to be part of the Encon family, and the industry is fortunate to have Betty Mullin as one of its trailblazing pioneers. Longtime vendor and Doorking's National Sales Director Dusty Beeding couldn't agree more.

He said, "Betty is a legend. She is one of the most inspiring distributors we've ever worked for. If you look up the word integrity, Betty's picture would be next to it. She put forth the utmost integrity and set the standard in the industry because she insisted on doing everything right by the book."

"She took distributorship to another level by hiring highly qualified technicians, and by pre-wiring the necessary peripheral devices. This simplified the process for dealers because the safety devices, detectors, light kits, etc. were already installed. Prior to Betty, installers would have to figure it out in the field on their own."

"She also gave everyone, no matter what their previous history, the same opportunity. She never asked for favors, even though she probably deserved them. I don't know how to give proper justice to someone who has put the amount of time into her company, the industry, her employees, and her own family that Betty has during her extraordinary career."

Betty's achievements in a male dominated industry can be linked to her pursuit of knowledge, her relentless integrity, and her strong business savvy. Her success and ultimately her legacy can be attributed to her unique ability to develop relationships and her genuine compassion for others. Beeding added, "Betty is as big of a humanitarian as she is an accomplished business woman. She is of one of the greatest players to ever work in this industry."

As of June 1, 2018, VP of Sales and Operations, Jeff Harris, is transitioning to President of Encon Electronics. Jeff has worked at Encon for 23 years and has served as Betty's right hand man for the past 18. Harris pointed out, "While Encon could never be the same without Betty running the helm, we are going to do our best to maintain the culture and philosophies that she has instilled. We will continue to offer quality products and focus on training and safety in the industry. Most importantly, we will continue to support our customers with the highest level of service possible. Betty wouldn't have it any other way."