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Adam Pardee | SFBT

Kristin Anderson, CEO:

Building the Bay Area's Future

Kristin Anderson, a leader at Eric F. Anderson Inc., is transforming the food industry's construction landscape across California and Hawaii. Her expertise in building and renovating grocery stores, restaurants, and commercial kitchens ensures businesses thrive with safe, efficient spaces.

A problem-solver and industry expert, Kristin is also a mentor, paving the way for more women in construction. She champions innovation and excellence, proving that great leadership knows no gender.

Recently featured in the San Francisco Business Times (Feb 2025), her recognition comes just in time for Women in Construction Week (March 2-8).

BUILDING THE BAY'S PANTRIES

Kristin Anderson took over the family firm to build out food-related buildings



BY WILLIAM HICKS
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As its name suggests, construction firm Eric F. Anderson Inc. is a testament to generational entrepreneurship. The company founded in 1945 by Eric Anderson, a Swedish immigrant who started a small construction business in Oakland, is now being run by his granddaughter, Kristin Anderson.

The company's origins are deeply rooted in grocery store construction and renovation with Safeway being one of their first and longest-standing clients. After her father Don Anderson took over in 1982 and grew the company, which later moved to San Leandro, to a \$50 million enterprise, the torch was eventually passed to Kristin Anderson following the sudden death of her father in 2008. With just two years of experience at the company, she had to develop her management chops quickly to bring the business back to family control, after a stint with an outside CEO.

She took on the CEO role in 2013, and led efforts to diversify the company's revenue outside grocery stores, particularly into other food businesses, building out the interiors of popular local chains like Blue Bottle Coffee and Señor Sisig.

Kristin and her mother's large stake in the company classifies it as a woman-owned business (the 20th largest in the Bay Area, according to our research) and

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WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

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puts it in league with other local women-owned contractors like Cahill Contractors and Shames Construction, along with qualifying the company for lucrative supplier-diversity contracts.

We talked to Kristin about her path into leading the family business and how business leaders can encourage more women to enter the construction industry.

Did you always know you would end up working at the family business? Growing up, I always thought I was going to work for the company and be in construction. But after I went to college at Santa Clara University, I quickly realized I was more of a math and engineering person, and so I moved into mechanical engineering and got my degree there. I worked in ultrahigh vacuum semiconductor processing, and it was a lot of fun and I got to travel the world.

My dad had given me space, but over time, I think he started looking out for his succession plan. The right word was he began recruiting me: "Hey, you should come work for the company. I think you should come check it out. Just try it out."

What was the transition like taking over? I wasn't able to truly work under my dad, mentor under him, as long as I would have liked to. There was a lot to learn very quickly. It's just part of any career – you just have to do the



WITH
**KRISTIN
ANDERSON**,
CEO of Eric F.
Anderson Inc.

hard work. Having to learn how to run a business, especially learning the financials, understanding how all the different pieces keep the doors open – insurance, legal compliance, HR, paying employees.

I think the biggest transition for myself was taking it from my dad's company, then making it my own. The first step was to learn the business of construction, then take it into different directions by embracing being a woman-owned business. Parts of my dad's vision are in there. Parts of my grandfather's vision are in there. But then a lot of it is my vision of where we want to take the company.

How has your vision differed from your father and grandfather's? We were always very much a grocery contractor. So how do we leverage that expertise and do other types of projects? We want to continue to put food on people's tables with grocery, retail and restaurants. But we're also bringing in a residential component where we put a roof over their heads and a health care component keeping people healthy. We don't want to put all our eggs in one grocery basket.

What motivated you to become a certified women-owned business? There was definitely feedback from other women-owned businesses. The whole wave of supplier diversity was really starting – cities and public projects were driving to diversify their supplier base. It was becoming more common for diverse businesses to get visibility

and benefits.

What benefits have you seen from being a woman-owned business? We've seen opportunities come about partly because we are a woman-owned business. On the public work side, and even private clients have added diverse supplier goals to their agenda. We've been able to qualify with clients a little quicker or easier because we are a woman-owned business.

Are you concerned at all there will be a rollback in supplier diversity programs due to the political backlash against DEI? From a business perspective, yes and no. I'm more just disappointed with the pulling back of opportunities for more disadvantaged communities people that don't get the same opportunities as others. There's concern there that people get shut out of opportunities. Some of these companies are saying we're not going to do that anymore, but it's not going away. There's a lot of really good advocates for diversity, inclusion and equity, and so it's going to continue to be present in our business and our market.

Over your career, have you seen more women enter the industry? I definitely see a lot more women in leadership roles, a lot more women as project managers, project engineers and estimators, which is great. And I would say I've seen more women in the field, but it's not nearly at the level we need to see. It's still challenging to get new women in boots-on-

the-ground construction roles. We have a female carpenter apprentice here that we recently hired. We work with the union, which has an outreach program for women, and we're going to continue to work with them to provide opportunities to women to work in the field.

What challenges do women face in the construction industry? It's hard when the industry isn't supportive of women's family needs. For example, if you're a single mom and day care opens at 6 a.m., but the job site starts at 5 a.m., you're going to have your hands tied. We need to find ways to support women and their families to work in these positions.

How do you think the industry can do better at attracting more women? We need more women in the industry reaching out and supporting other women – finding networks, showcasing successful women carpenters, superintendents and foremen. Let newer generations see that success is possible and bring them along.

How has San Leandro changed since your company moved there? When we first got here, Costco wasn't even there. You see developments like the Bayfair have really taken off into more of an innovation, technology-based type of use. We're seeing more multifamily housing. San Leandro has always been considered an affordable place to live compared to neighboring cities. ☑



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