

Clearly Without Limits

From concept to completion, this Los Angeles firm does the nearly impossible with glass



71 Above Giroux Glass



Admirals Club

Giroux Glass, Inc.

PRESIDENT AND CEO
Nataline Lomedico

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
AND PUBLIC RELATIONS
Barbara Kotsos

LOCATION
Los Angeles, California

For historic Giroux Glass, Inc. of Los Angeles, no glass-related construction job is too daunting. Working on the most unusual locations and structures, the woman-led, employee stock ownership plan company has performed such feats of installation as the see-through Grand Canyon Skywalk and the 27-foot-tall glass chocolate fountain at the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas.

"Whether it's working near the edge of a cliff or helicoptering glass to meet the needs of our clients, that's what we'll do," says Nataline Lomedico, President and CEO of Giroux.

Working with project architects and engineers, Giroux Glass' high-end design team turns renderings into reality. The firm's CAD technicians use three-dimensional (3D) modeling to plan for the installation of oversized doors and windows, glass staircases, elevator shafts and channel glass walls.

The 71-year-old company does commercial and residential construction work on projects ranging from high-rise buildings to celebrity homes, while providing service and repairs to existing doors, skylights, storefronts and windows.

According to Lomedico, the company takes on projects from concept to completion and then services them for the long term.

UNIQUE PROJECTS

The commercial contracts team at Giroux has designed and installed one-of-a-kind projects across the nation.

"One of the things that we pride ourselves on is that we take on those projects that seem to be the most challenging," says Barbara Kotsos, Director of Marketing and Public Relations for Giroux.

"I would say that the [Grand Canyon] Skywalk we did in 2007 was the single most challenging project that we had to get to because of logistics. It wasn't easy—it was 4,000 feet above the bottom of the Grand Canyon, a few hours away from Las Vegas on an [Hualapai] Indian reservation, hanging off the end of a cliff."

The Giroux Glass crew took on the challenge by installing glass in a horseshoe-shaped structure, which extended out from the edge of the cliff.

"Traveling to and from the jobsite was extremely difficult," Kotsos says. "One guy had to traverse a very narrow road 14 miles each way and bring all of the heavy equipment necessary to work with that [structure]. We were working with altitude and cold, snow and wind."

Those painstaking efforts pay off daily as Skywalk visitors get to view the deep canyon below through the very glass on which they're walking.

Giroux Glass met an entirely different type of challenge at the Bellagio Hotel, known for its elaborate fountains. There, the firm pulled off the installation of the world's largest chocolate fountain.

"The chocolate fountain took a lot of engineering and mock-up testing," Lomedico says. "We had mock-ups from Canada to see how the chocolate would flow."

Locating and placing each glass bowl required careful consideration, as each one had to ensure the chocolate would flow appropriately and remain at the right temperature.

“All the glass was produced and installed at a factory in Montreal, packaged and shipped down to Las Vegas and put back together on-site,” Kotsos says. “The bowls were supported by suspension cables attached to the ceiling.”

Thanks to Giroux Glass’ expertise, guests and visitors can watch more than 2,000 pounds of molten dark, white and milk chocolate cascade over the suspended glass bowls of a 27-foot-high (26’3”) work of moving art.

Another Giroux Glass-installed landmark in the City of Lights is the signage for the famous strip’s Dolce & Gabbana store. The creation has been dubbed the “Black Gem of the Las Vegas Strip.”

“We do a lot of complex designs,” says Lomedico, “but with Dolce & Gabbana, we actually won an award for that project, from a glazing industry magazine.”

HISTORIC FIRM, ACCELERATED GROWTH

Giroux Glass was founded in 1946 as a small family-owned glass repair business. It remained much the same until it was purchased in 1991 by current Board Chair Anne-Merelie Murrell.

Early 1990s unrest in Los Angeles—the 1992 riots and the 1994 Northridge earthquake—proved fortuitous for the company, as the resulting demand for glass service and repair soared. Giroux Glass grew to meet the need, and within 10 years of the purchase, sales had increased by more than 300 percent. High-end residential and retail design were added to the firm’s offerings, along with commercial contract work, fabrication and computer-aided design.


Giroux Glass currently ranks among ENR Magazine’s Top 20 Firms in Glazing and Curtain Wall, as well as Glass Magazine’s Top 50 Glaziers in the United States. Giroux Glass is also a certified Woman-owned Business Enterprise, and one of comparatively few construction-related businesses under female executive leadership.

“Construction was the only industry I ever worked in since I was 19 years old,” Lomedico

says. “I never saw it as male-dominated or that it was something unique that I was a woman. It was a matter of working hard and proving yourself, but the more people reach out to us about woman-owned and woman-run construction companies, I realize it is a very small percentage.”

Giroux Glass will soon be in the minority of construction firms in another sense. The firm is moving toward employee ownership, with the process to be completed this year.

Murrell contemplated selling the company in 2005, Lomedico says, but she chose a different path that would lead to employee ownership.

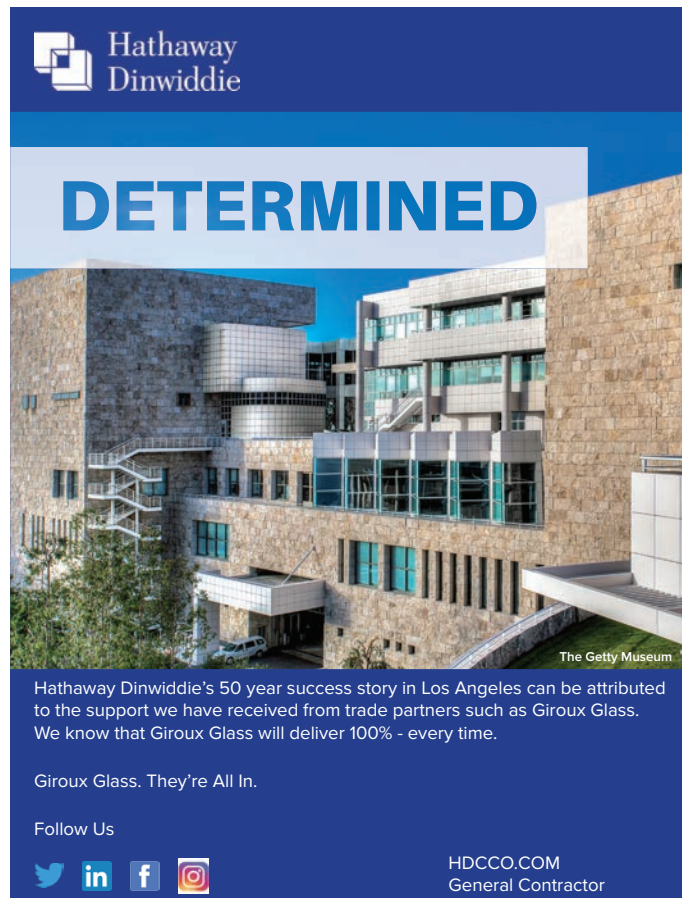
“She was afraid the company would become something different,” Lomedico says. “The plan [allows her] to broadly distribute the stock of the company. This year, in a few weeks, it will be a 100 percent employee-owned company. Our employee turnover rate is less than 4 percent, and the ability to be able to carry on our legacy has instilled a strong sense of pride at Giroux.” 




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