





Meet the New ACEC President/CEO

Linda Bauer Darr assumed the reins as president/CEO of ACEC in August, succeeding Dave Raymond.

In an exclusive interview with *Engineering Inc.*, Darr reflects on her extensive association experience and provides insights into her vision as ACEC's new leader.

ACEC: What prompted you to seek the CEO position at ACEC?

LINDA BAUER DARR: The president/CEO position of ACEC is an opportunity that inspired me. Dave Raymond and all the ACEC stakeholders have built a very strong foundation. From that stable foundation, we have an opportunity to further grow the association and build out some new dimensions.

With so many changes underway in our society and economy today, the engineering industry can be more prominent as a thought leader on public policy. In the past, ACEC's mission focused on building quality of life for others. Engineering accomplishes that, and more. That is what I want to focus on. This industry helps stimulate people's minds to achieve their loftiest goals. We do that by connecting vision with ability. By translating big and small ideas into practical engineering processes, we bridge a gap. Our ideas and solutions can make possible what previously was not.

This inspires me, and I want to share that inspiration with ACEC stakeholders to showcase our industry's value and to put us in a position of even greater strength.

CABLE RIBBON

ACEC: You have been CEO of two organizations—the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) and the American Moving & Storage Association (AMSA). How will those experiences benefit you at ACEC?

DARR: There are two paths I can go down here. First is association leadership, and second is subject matter expertise. This will actually be my fifth trade association, but only two of those, as you mention, I had the great pleasure to lead. Trade association leadership is an art and not a science.

As ACEC members will soon find out, I am not a scientist. With trade associations, even though you may be in charge, ultimately you do not own the business. You are the caretaker, and the members are the owners. That requires a mix of ambition and humility, and you need to know how to take direction as well as give direction.

AMSA taught me how to be bold and to lead because when I came on board, the association and industry were experiencing dramatic disruption, and we needed to figure out a way to survive and thrive. ASLRRA taught me the lesson of the “little engine that could.” Patience, discipline, determination and humility are critical to achieving real, long-lasting success. The ACEC mission to win the hearts and minds of policymakers and to help our members grow incorporates the same principles I learned working with both AMSA and ASLRRA.

In terms of subject matter expertise, my work at the U.S. Department of Transportation providing funding for all matter of transportation infrastructure and with the large engineering firm EG&G and the smaller Frontier Engineering are as helpful in allowing me to understand the experience of ACEC’s membership as anything I have done in the trade association realm. But working with the operators who use the infrastructure brings a users perspective, and that is where my work with the motor coach, moving, trucking and rail industries come into play.

ACEC: What has been your most satisfying professional achievement so far and why?

DARR: There is not a single one. I know that is not what you wanted to hear. Growth and being part of a winning team is probably the most satisfying experience for me in my professional career.

When I was young, I was focused primarily on my career growth and doing whatever I could to gain the insights and experience that would allow me to keep climbing the ladder. As I moved on in my career, it was the satisfaction of being part of a winning team that was inspiring.

But at this stage in my career, I get the most satisfaction out of watching others grow in their jobs and watching the team grow. It is an enormous reward to witness team success, coach them through failures and foster the camaraderie that is the reward of a strong team effort. At the end of the day, we are not always going to win or go home happy, but we need to know that we gave it our all and that we were supported in our efforts.

ACEC: What intrigues you the most about ACEC’s structure as a federation with 52 independent Member Organizations?



DARR: The federation structure is a huge benefit for any industry association. The grassroots work is being done every day by the Member Organizations while ACEC national is minding the store in Washington, D.C. It should be a very symbiotic relationship.

As the Member Organizations grow in size and strength, so grows all of ACEC and vice versa. Members of Congress go home most every weekend, and that is often where the industry can have the most impactful audience with these decision-makers through our Member Organizations.

The Member Organizations are the eyes and ears for ACEC at the local level where precedent-setting policy can be made affecting the entire industry. With the Member Organizations, we can work to stop bad policy in its tracks before it gets to the national level, or, conversely, once it has risen to a national level, we can band together as an industry to either fight bad policy or support good policy when it migrates to Washington, D.C.

The key is to coordinate, collaborate and have mutual respect for our individual roles and needs. I want to be a part of that conversation from the start of my time at ACEC.

ACEC: What special interests, activities or hobbies do you enjoy when you are away from work?

DARR: I really wish I had something more interesting to say here, but I am afraid I have a pretty typical response. I like to exercise, travel and do some subpar gardening. But I do have some exciting travel stories. I have zip lined in Costa Rica, sipped vodka in an ice hotel and run with the bulls in Pamplona.

Linda Bauer Darr (right) meets with ACEC staff along with ACEC Chairman Manish Kothari (center) and former ACEC President/CEO Dave Raymond.



CABLE PUSION

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LINDA BAUER DARR

ACEC: What is your all-time favorite book, movie and song and why?

DARR: Book? too many to name...Movie? *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Song? “Sweet Caroline”...Why? no reason. Does there need to be a reason? Oh yes, you are engineers. I guess I will have to get used to that. Let me think on it! ■



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