

## National Trench Safety and co-founder Shelly Bangerter promote work culture where all can succeed in shoring industry.

by James McRay

Shoring is special. It saves lives, but it also helps contractors be productive and successful. It's a rare dichotomy of safety and profitability. And regardless of which factor motivates someone to be a part of the industry, the fact remains that trench shoring is vitally important to excavation and utility contractors; both as a safety tool and a production tool.

"Shoring is so simple, yet it is so critical," succinctly explains Shelly Bangerter, CFO and cofounder of National Trench Safety, headquartered in Houston, Texas. "Yes, it's a broad range of different industries we serve, but it all falls under infrastructure; and it seems that whenever the economy needs a reboot, it starts with infrastructure. We are a part of that, too," she says.

As a 20-year veteran of the trench shoring industry, Bangerter can speak with authority on the topic. But there was a time when choosing to remain a part of the trench shoring industry was a risky venture.

"Back in 2001, I was the Regional Financial Manager at National Equipment Services, overseeing the company's trench shoring division," Bangerter begins. "When NES sold its shoring division, I had to choose between staying with the company or follow my passion," she says. "I chose to follow my passion which was shoring."

In the meantime, Bangerter along with Ron Chilton joined a company and helped expand their business. Eventually, they decided that it was time to reenter the trench shoring industry. "We wanted to do this ourselves because we believed in the importance of trench safety," Bangerter says.

In late 2003, a group including Bangerter, Chilton, and others bought the Mikedon shoring company in Houston and reopened the doors as National Trench Safety. The first order of business was bringing on staff—both qualified men and women—that were hardworking, knowledgeable, and passionate about shoring.

"From the start, the culture at NTS has always been to employ the most experienced and professional people, regardless of gender," says Bangerter. "There are women in many key roles throughout our organization, including a branch manager, procurement manager, inventory manager, and several operations managers" she says.

"We really take our cue from Ron. It's his passion and attitude that energizes the group and encourages us to constantly keep learning," Bangerter continues. "Everyone adds value, and that culture allows us to be successful."

As for the perception that the shoring industry is male-dominated based on the attendance at the annual NAXSA Conference, Bangerter is quick to debunk that myth. "I think the reason you don't see more women at the Conference is that we are all back running our companies," she chides. "Like I said, we have women throughout the organization and they all really know the shoring business; but it's the specialized personnel like district managers, branch managers, trainers and engineers that get all the attention and attend the conference," she explains.

“I’ve been in this industry for more than 20 years. Believe me, I know our equipment; I know the value of our equipment even though I may not be out in the field every day,” assets Bangerter. “So do many, many other women throughout this industry.”