

ON THE LEVEL | SANDI ARMSTRONG

WIDESPREAD SUCCESS



Submitted Photo

GETTING TO KNOW ARMSTRONG

The Daily Reporter: What surprises you most about your job?

Armstrong: I work with my husband, meaning we live and work together, which is great. However, I was surprised how easily your work life can dominate your family life. We realized we have to make time for the family without work talk involved.

TDR: Which living person do you most admire?

Armstrong: My dad. He was the associate dean of the business school at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for 38 years, and he played an integral role in developing the program and many of Milwaukee's business leaders. The business school started as an extension of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has grown greatly since, so it was amazing to see the impact that he and his colleagues had on the Milwaukee community. Even with the amount of work my dad put into the school, he always ensured he made time for his family, which is something my husband and I hope to emulate.

TDR: What other job(s) did you consider trying?

Armstrong: I started as a mechanical engineer working in sales and marketing and eventually evolved into health care. In 2014, we opened our City Wide of Milwaukee. We first got involved in the brand because we were impressed with City Wide's model. It's such a different model than what's already out there. We also enjoyed that the model stands strong in tougher economies, as there will always be a need for buildings to be maintained.

TDR: What is your greatest fear?

Armstrong: The thing that drives my husband and me

most is making an impact with our clients, contractors and community as a whole. My greatest fear is not being able to do enough, even though we have systems and processes in place to make our team and clients happy. I want to be able to do everything we set out to do.

TDR: What is your greatest extravagance?

Armstrong: Time with my family. Owning a business doesn't always allow you to be able to unplug and have that quality time. But sometimes you just have to turn off your phone and email and create new memories with your family.

TDR: What would you never wear?

Armstrong: Heels. For me, comfortable shoes are a must so I can focus on leading my business; not my feet.

TDR: If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Armstrong: I always laugh when I say this, but my kids and I joke that I wish I had 12 arms so I'm able to do everything. I wish I could cook, respond to emails, lead my employees, spend time with my kids, all at once.

TDR: What would your colleagues be surprised to find out about you?

Armstrong: Our girls attended the Milwaukee German Immersion School and, thanks to the program, are fluent. We are extremely proud of our city and the many benefits, including the immersion schools, that Milwaukee provides for its residents. At City Wide, we are constantly talking about what we call the ripple effect. We regularly look for ways that our business and employees can give back to the Milwaukee community.

Armstrong brings City Wide maintenance business to Wisconsin

Chris Thompson

Special to The Daily Reporter

On its surface, the company Sandi Armstrong is running has little to do with her professional experiences.

City Wide, a commercial-building-maintenance business that Armstrong and her husband, Robby, started in Milwaukee in 2014, is one of 54 independently owned and operated maintenance companies that's run in the U.S. under the same name. The company sells building-management services ranging from janitorial work to parking-lot maintenance. Its clients include industries, institutions, offices, medical centers and dealerships, she said.

"We loved the potential of the industry," Armstrong said, "and loved that people will always be investing in their buildings."

Despite her great reliance on her past experiences, there's only one obvious link between what she's doing now at City Wide and her past working for automation and biomedical giants: In both situations, it's all about business. For Armstrong, that one connection, as well as a chance to do what she loves back home in the Milwaukee area, was all she needed.

"It's really allowed us to utilize our past experience," she said, "and it meets our personal goals as well."

Armstrong's experience actually starts with mechanical engineering and her love of math and science. She said she comes from a long

line of mechanical engineers..

"We were a family of problem solvers and analytical thinkers," she said.

She earned her own mechanical engineering degree in 1994 from the University of Minnesota and then moved back to Milwaukee. She took a sales and marketing job at Rockwell Automation and then eventually started doing the same type of work for Eaton Corp.

During that time, she went back to school to get her MBA, which she did while still working full time. Her father was one of the deans of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee business school. That, Armstrong said, gave her a chance from a young age to see how businesses operate.

She soon found herself wanting a broader view of how businesses work, prompting her decision to go for the MBA, which she earned from UWM in 2000.

About two years later, she and Robby, who also worked at Eaton, moved to Alabama for work. Around that time, she said, she left the automation industry for opportunities in the biomedical field. She started at a small company and then switched to Merck, where she did sales and marketing work for nine years.

Eaton eventually transferred her husband back to Milwaukee for two years and then to Virginia. But their family had decided it was time to settle down, she said.

Around that time, executive recruiters from

City Wide spoke to them about starting a business, she said. They had been reached out to over the years by other recruiters, she said, but this time was different.

The company's business plans, Armstrong said, stood out for several reasons. For one, City Wide had no office in Wisconsin. That, she said, was somewhat surprising, given that the building-maintenance industry has more than \$100 billion a year in revenue.

Although neither she nor her husband had experience in building maintenance, both knew quite a bit about technology and automation. And they had the sort of business acumen that appeals to recruiters, Armstrong said.

"Of course," she said, "it's always a leap of faith when you start a new business."

One big advantage they could claim, Armstrong said, was that, rather than having to start from scratch, they would be going into a new market with a business that had already proved itself elsewhere.

Success has come quickly for Armstrong. Since moving back to Milwaukee and opening City Wide in 2014, she has watched her company gain a presence in nine counties in southeast Wisconsin. Its staff now numbers 15 employees, as well as various building managers.

Armstrong said she's glad she acted on the inclination she felt long ago to get an MBA.

"I always had that inkling," she said, "that I might start a business."

THE DAILY REPORTER

www.dailyreporter.com • 414-225-1801

fax: 414-276-8057 | email: info@dailyreporter.com

225 E. Michigan St., Suite 300, Milwaukee WI 53202

Associate Publisher/Editor Joe Yovino, 414-225-1829
 Managing Editor Dan Shaw, 414-225-1807
 JobTrac Manager Rich Holevoet, 414-225-1822
 Ad Director Susan Quinn, 414-225-1844
 Regional Office Manager Bonnie Porter, 414-225-1804
 To re-deliver a missing or damaged newspaper copy, call, 414-225-1801

A newspaper of general circulation devoted to the publication of news and intelligence of a general character. The Daily Reporter is the official publication for the Circuit Courts — First Judicial District (Milwaukee County). The Daily Reporter is the official newspaper for the city of Milwaukee.

Entire contents copyright 2019 by The Daily Reporter Publishing Co. Published daily except Saturdays, Sundays, New Years Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, the Friday after Thanksgiving and Christmas. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

POSTMASTER: Electronic Address Change Service Requested. Send address changes to: Subscription Services P.O. Box 1051, Williamsport PA 17703-9940 ISSN # 0749-7113 / USPS # 565-720

One Year Print and Online: \$239, One Year Online: \$199
 One Year JobTrac and Daily Reporter Combo: \$625
 To subscribe: call 877-615-9536

The Daily Reporter is a member of The Associated Press, National Newspaper Association, American Court and Commercial Newspapers and Wisconsin Newspaper Association.

Under no condition will any judgment, decree or other matter of record be withheld from publication. Advertiser's sole and exclusive remedy against The Daily Reporter for claims for loss and damage resulting from any cause, including — without limitation — errors, omissions, misruns and delays in publication, shall be either the publication of corrected material once without additional charge or a refund of the amount paid for the initial publication. In no event shall The Daily Reporter be liable for incidental, special or consequential damages, or for any other loss, damage or expense of any kind.