

While Jill Dupleich (right), President of ARA Contractors, Inc., oversees operations, Vice President Alexandra Dupleich (left) is the driving force behind business development.

BREAKING THROUGH WALLS

ARA Contractors, Inc.
changes the face of demolition

by Susan Diemont-Conwell



With intention and purpose, two women survey the city of Long

Beach, California, from the 15th floor of a commercial high-rise. Jill Dupleich, President, and daughter Alexandra Dupleich, Vice President, of *ARA Contractors, Inc.* take in the beauty of the night sky and prepare for their project. Soon, the crews of this demolition company will gut the 30,000-square-foot floor, removing walls, ceiling and flooring in preparation for a major renovation.

Daytime tenants remain blissfully unaware of the fast and furious work happening on that 15th floor as the company's crews work from 6 p.m. until 3:30 a.m., performing the

detailed work by hand, loading trash, separating recyclables and transporting all materials down the elevators and out the door.

Despite logistical challenges, ARA Contractors delivered the project ahead of schedule, and its work was so appreciated that the client enlisted the company to help finish demolition on another floor of the high-rise, where a competitor firm had failed to deliver.

Jill is proud to say that ARA Contractors' dedication and attention to detail is turning heads in the construction industry—even more often than the second looks Jill occasionally receives for heading a woman-owned business in a male-dominated field.

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"This is gratifying work," she says. "With more than 20 years in the construction industry, I could have easily just retired in a few years, but I wanted to leave something for my children. That's why I formed ARA Contractors in 2017." Of Jill's three children, two are in the demolition industry. "Ryan is just out of high school and starting to learn the trade and gain experience. Alexandra is the driving force behind business development for ARA Contractors," she says.

Headquartered in Garden Grove, California, ARA Contractors provides demolition services for government, public works, commercial, industrial and residential clients throughout Southern California. "We manage projects many startup companies couldn't touch due to their size and complexity. But because of my longstanding experience in the industry and partnership with a strong industry player, we have the ability and know-how to execute multimillion-dollar contracts from start to finish," Jill says.

LEVERAGING INDUSTRY RESOURCES

With a self-professed education from the "School of Hard Knocks," Jill never imagined working in the construction field. She spent the early days of her career in the finance and banking industry. After the birth of her second child, Jill needed to temporarily reduce her hours to part-time and joined a hauling and transportation company.

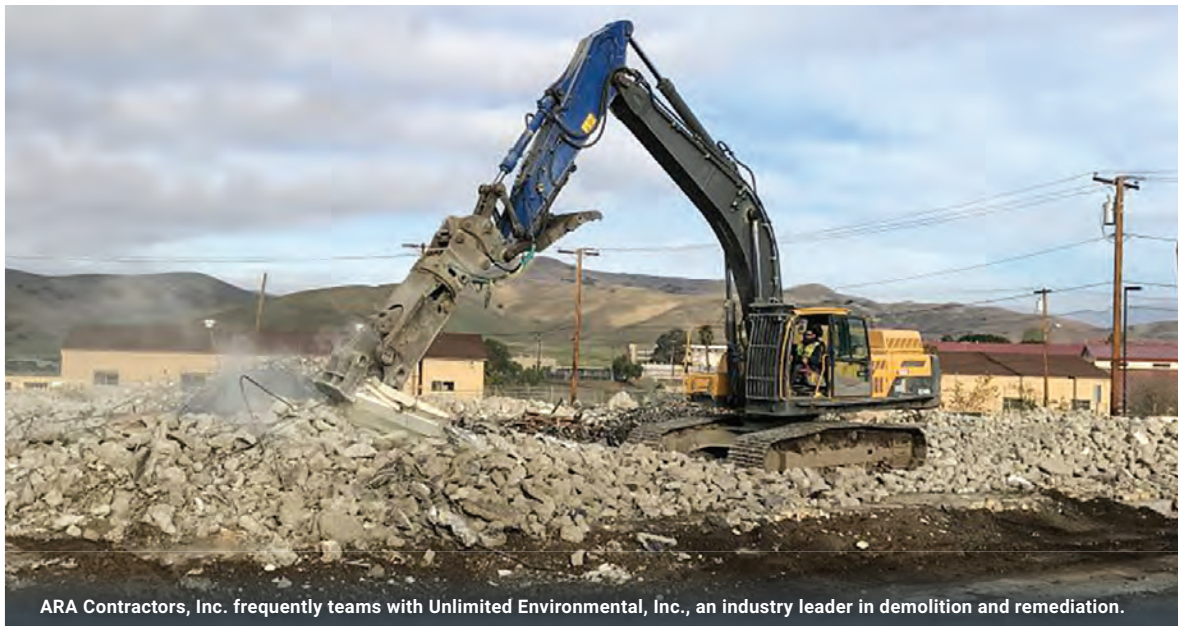
A chance meeting with customer W. Scott Lange, President of Unlimited Environmental, Inc., set Jill on a path that would define her career in the construction industry. "Unlimited Environmental was still a young company in the mid-'90s, and Scott needed someone to come in for 10 hours a week to help him with his books," she says. Jill managed accounts receivable, accounts payable and payroll for the fledgling firm, as it built its reputation by providing environmental remediation and demolition services to customers across Southern California.

As Unlimited Environmental grew, so did Jill's role in the company. Today, in addition to managing ARA Contractors, Jill serves as Executive Vice President of Unlimited Environmental, which has grown from \$1 million to \$17 million in revenue and has 150 employees.

"ARA Contractors is in essence the progeny of Unlimited Environmental. We manage our own projects, but have teaming agreements in place with Unlimited to execute those projects," she says. "We meet the needs of clients in search of a contractor with a woman-business enterprise (WBE) certification, but have the backing and resources of an industry leader in demolition and remediation."

COMPETITIVE PRICING

With the ability to leverage the resources at Unlimited Environmental, ARA Contractors has experienced much



ARA Contractors, Inc. frequently teams with Unlimited Environmental, Inc., an industry leader in demolition and remediation.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNLIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL, INC.



“We have the ability and know-how to execute multimillion-dollar contracts from start to finish.”

**Jill Dupleich, President,
ARA Contractors, Inc.**

By partnering with Unlimited Environmental, Inc. on the execution of demolition projects, ARA Contractors, Inc. has been able to take on large projects right out of the gate.

stronger growth than other startup businesses. “We have taken on large projects right out of the gate,” Jill says.

Those projects include the removal of military housing in San Diego. “This was a sizable project for the U.S. Marine Corps,” Jill says. “We demoed five buildings, removing the structures, as well as the foundations, concrete walkways and all the underground utilities.”

“We had multiple machines working on the job site,” Alexandra adds. “To see those buildings come down was super exciting.” She notes proudly that the project was completed on time and within budget.

Jill adds that a key part of any demolition project is recycling. “We take the time to sort and clean every piece of concrete and brick, as well as ferrous and non-ferrous metals. Though recycling is only mandatory for LEED projects, we believe it’s important to keep waste out of our landfills.” And, revenue made from recycling translates into lower costs. “If we know we can make several thousand

dollars back through recycling, we can offer more competitive pricing for the client,” she says.

Another recent project was the demolition of a 6,000-square-foot restaurant in Carlsbad. “We were front and center for this project as the restaurant was right off the freeway,” Alexandra says. While the building and foundation came down easily, the most interesting part of the project was the removal of the restaurant’s 70-foot-tall sign. “This sign was huge,” she recalls. ARA Contractors utilized a crane to safely dismantle the signage.

ENSURING EMPLOYEE SAFETY

“Maintaining a safe work environment is of the highest priority,” Jill says. “Employees are not just a number in the field. They are part of a team and are responsible for looking out for themselves and looking out for others.”

In her role at Unlimited Environmental, Jill helps to oversee the safety program, which includes monthly hands-on training. “We’ll bring in a piece of equipment and do two days of training,” she says.

“We just finished aerial lift training with an OSHA-certified trainer. Sixty employees received or renewed their OSHA safety training certification during those two days.”

ARA Contractors doesn’t just rely on monthly safety meetings, but also commits to having a visual presence in the field. “We operate with the highest standards and safety protocols, and we make sure we’re out on project sites to ensure those protocols are followed,” Alexandra says.

LISTENING TO FIELD WORKERS

With more than 20 years at Unlimited Environmental, Jill understands the value of committed employees. “These people are the reason we’re able to do all that we do, and we work to provide a rewarding work environment where employees can take pride in their accomplishments.”

Jill likes to be on-site with crews, providing positive reinforcement and involving field workers in the decision-making process. “I’m not a leader who just sits behind a desk.



It's important for me to be out in the field to see what's going on, to listen to employees and together come up with ideas to work through issues and improve our processes. These people are the heart and soul of this company."

EARNING RESPECT

Though Jill wishes her gender wasn't an issue with some, she is proud of earning the respect of those in the field. "Many of the supervisors at Unlimited Environmental have been with the company more than 15 years. They know that I foster a teamwork environment and that I care for their safety. When new employees come onboard, they quickly find out that I am well respected and good to work for."

Jill admits that she's had a few tense meetings around the conference table with male clients who were less than pleased about a woman's leading role on a project. "Once, during my early days at Unlimited Environmental, there were 25 people sitting around a conference table with representatives

of a large general contractor. I was discussing change orders when the vice president of that firm stood up, questioned my qualifications and refused to talk with me, even though I was the person who had signed and knew all the details of the contract.

"But Scott had my back as usual. He's been an amazing mentor and so supportive over the years," Jill says. "It's gotten easier over time; but still, when workers see a tall blonde woman walk onto a job site, some assume that I don't know anything. Once we get into the meat of a project though, they learn quickly that I'm not just some stupid girl."

Jill appreciates the opportunity to pass along her knowledge to

Alexandra, and the two look forward to mentoring other women who are entering the field. "I've watched Unlimited Environmental grow through the years and now I have the opportunity to grow something alongside my mother, who is so inspiring and strong-headed," Alexandra says. "I've never found it intimidating to work in a male-dominated field. My mom taught me to be confident, get in there and do my best."

"My vision is to grow ARA Contractors into a top-performing demolition and abatement company," Jill says. "It won't happen overnight, but we are knowledgeable, service-oriented and do outstanding work. Together, Alexandra and I are helping to change the face of demolition." 🐾

ARA Contractors, Inc. provides demolition services for government, public works, commercial, industrial and residential clients throughout Southern California.

With more than 20 years in the communications industry, Susan Diemont-Conwell works with companies, nonprofits and individuals to produce stories and publications that move and inspire.