

On a roll

With Janet Felosky at the wheel, Monroe Tractor & Implement Co. has posted record sales over the last few years, and in 2011 revenue topped \$100 million. Profile starts on page 10.



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

PROFILE

Driving growth at the family business

Monroe Tractor president Janet Felosky has guided the company to record sales

By VELVET SPICER

Janet Felosky feels quite comfortable at the helm of a company in a male-dominated industry.

"It's easy for me to make a decision be-

cause I don't take things emotionally," says the 62-year-old president of Monroe Tractor & Implement Co. Inc. "That's probably from hanging around with guys most of my life. I don't wear my feelings on my sleeve. I play a good poker game, I guess you could say."

Growing up in Henrietta before it was the bustling suburb it is today, Felosky loved the outdoors and often could be found playing or doing chores outside, per-

haps foreshadowing her eventual leadership role in the family-owned construction and agricultural equipment business.

A black-and-white photo of her as a child atop a tractor is pinned to her office wall. A speech bubble placed above her head by her sister says, "Someday I'm going to be president."

Though as a youngster Felosky aspired to have a grown-up career as a horse owner, her dream was squelched when she left

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for college at Kent State University and could not take her horse with her. Today, she says, she thoroughly enjoys her role in the company her father built.

“It’s the only place I’ve worked since I was a kid,” Felosky recalls. “I always came up here instead of staying home and doing the housework. It’s not like I grew up in the business, but in high school, after school, you came up here and ran the errands that needed to be run.”

Felosky’s father, Henry Hansen, started the company in 1951 at West Henrietta Road and Lehigh Station Road, an area known for many years as “Backhoe Park” because of the construction equipment that lined the hilly road. In 1999 Monroe Tractor sold the property to Patrick Buick GMC.

In its six decades, Monroe Tractor has grown to 11 locations statewide, with two divisions and some 180 employees. The Rochester facility—now near Route 390 on Lehigh Station Road—has 50 staffers.

In 2000 Felosky told the RBJ that the company had posted revenue of \$65 million. Monroe Tractor has had record sales over the last couple of years, she says, and last year revenue exceeded \$100 million.

“That was a milestone,” she says.

Family business

Despite her relationship to the company’s founder, Felosky’s rise to the top at Monroe Tractor was not meteoric.

After her college graduation in 1972, Felosky’s husband wanted to live in Rochester, so she joined the family business. She started in shipping and receiving for the parts department and labored there for three or four years until the credit department had an opening.

“I can remember coming back from my grandmother’s and asking my father about that, and he said, ‘You’ve got to go interview with the credit manager,’” she says.

The credit manager, however, was reluctant to hire her because of his past experience at other companies where nepotism ran rampant.

“I said, ‘Oh, you don’t have to worry about that with my father,’” Felosky recalls with a laugh.

She worked as assistant credit manager for several years while she had her three children. During that time she often worked from home rather than putting her kids in daycare. Eventually she was named credit manager and treasurer.

She was being groomed to take over eventually for her father, who was serving as CEO of Monroe Tractor, when the company’s president died suddenly.

“That’s a big blow. He wasn’t 60 yet,”



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

Felosky says of the president.

“Sunday afternoon dinner at my parents, and my father said, ‘I think I’m going to make this gentleman the president.’ My typical comment was, ‘It’s your business; you can do what you want.’ I come in Monday morning, and he says, ‘Well, you’re going to be the president.’”

Two decades later Felosky continues to

serve as president, while at 91 her father remains CEO.

“He enjoys looking at the deals and being around youth,” Felosky says of her father. “He’s still very active.”

Her sister, Sandra Alvarez, who serves as rental manager, plans to retire in the spring after 30 years with Monroe Tractor. Felosky’s son, Christian, works as custom-

er service representative manager, while her daughter, Laura, was hired last year as marketing manager.

"I think my biggest accomplishment is my family and their desire to want to work with me," Felosky says. "My family is the most important thing to me, and I can see why my father really hung around like he did. It's exciting to have kids in the business."

Diversification

When Hansen founded Monroe Tractor, its focus was on selling and servicing agricultural equipment, because much of suburban Rochester and the surrounding area was still farmland. A 60-year-old, three-foot iron eagle perched on a globe sits in the company's storefront, a reminder of Monroe Tractor's early days selling Case agricultural equipment.

"That's what really helped us grow, the agriculture," Felosky notes.

But in the 1960s, as Rochester's suburbs grew and nearby farmland was shrinking, Monroe Tractor moved its farm equipment business to Batavia, Canandaigua and Branchport, Yates County, while adding construction equipment to the mix.

Five of the company's locations are exclusively for agricultural equipment—the facilities in Batavia, Canandaigua, Hornell, Auburn and Adams Center, Jefferson County—while its Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany locations sell and service construction equipment. Monroe Tractor's Elmira and Binghamton stores offer both types of equipment.

The company continues to sell Case equipment by CNH America LLC, as well as equipment by Doosan Corp., Kuhn Krause Inc. and other manufacturers. Some 40 percent of Monroe Tractor's business is Case equipment.

Janet Felosky

Title: President, Monroe Tractor & Implement Co. Inc.

Home: Canandaigua

Age: 62

Education: B.S., business administration, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, 1972

Family: Husband Gregory; son Christian, 35; daughters Laura, 33, and Kimberly, 30

Hobbies: Family, golf, skiing, gardening

Quote: "If you've got the right people, it doesn't matter what you're selling. You can sell anything. People do business with people."

The recession and the resultant turmoil in the construction industry took its toll on Monroe Tractor's business, and in 2009 the construction division did not make a profit for the first time.

"But the ag division being as strong as it was, we were profitable, just not what we're accustomed to," Felosky says. "We got it turned around. And it's because of the people we have working here. They're after it every day. That's why we're successful."

"We don't just sell the manufacturers we represent, but we sell what we can do for the customer."

Felosky says selling the company is what differentiates Monroe Tractor from its competitors.

"We don't just sell the manufacturers we represent, but we sell what we can do for the customer," she explains. "Keep the customer working, that's our motto."

Atmosphere

Construction division general sales manager John Dancy says the company culture is what makes a difference.

"Every day we try to get out there and surpass what our customers' expectations are," he says, adding that diversity of products is the second factor in the company's success.

Dancy says the atmosphere at Monroe Tractor is never dull.

"It's a culture where if you want to grow yourself and take on more challenges, you can," he says. "It's a tremendous group of people to work with. We take pride in what we do. You really want to come into work every day."

Credit manager Rebecca Pellegrino calls the environment family-oriented.

"It's just a close-knit team up here," says the 24-year veteran of the company.

Teamwork is crucial at Monroe Tractor, Felosky says.

"All the departments have to work together for the success. They're all inter-related," she says. "Every department is a profit center, but at the end of the day we're one company."

Felosky tends to be selective when hiring employees, and finding the right person for the job can be frustrating, she says.

"You can tell who will have the energy," she says. "You've got to find people who are going to fit into your culture. It has taken us six months, nine months sometimes to replace people."

It is her biggest challenge right now, Felosky says.

"If you've got the right people, it doesn't

matter what you're selling. You can sell anything," she says. "People do business with people."

Her father's motto was always "Where courtesy dwells, service excels," Felosky recalls, and it is one that still holds.

"We did a video, and my father is in it. And one of the last things he says is, 'If you're courteous to the customer, the customer will do business with you,'" Felosky notes. "People are still people. We like to be treated with respect. That's the kind of people we look for, genuine people."

Felosky describes her management style as hands-off.

"If I've got a good manager, I shouldn't have to worry too much about what he's doing. And that's pretty much what I do most days," she says. "I like to let people go do their own job. I have a good pulse on No. 1, the people, and No. 2, the customer."

Dancy says Felosky likes to see her employees engaged.

"She doesn't hold them back. If you have an idea and you have a way to improve Monroe Tractor or improve the way we do business with our customers, she's not afraid to let you go run with that," he explains, likening her approach to that of a coach.

Pellegrino says Felosky knows everything that is going on and is there to help employees, but she allows them to find their own way.

"She's hands-on, but she also gives us our own leeway as well," she explains.

What keeps her coming back for more, Felosky says, is that each day is a challenge.

"Every day is a different day," she says, adding that there is not a lot that keeps her up at night.

The best part of her job is dealing with satisfied customers and having employees who are happy with what they do, Felosky says.

Having to say no is difficult, she says, and it is something she may labor over. But she takes nightly walks to clear her head and tries not to bring work home with her.

Felosky's long-term goal for the company is simply to keep doing what it has been doing as long as feasible. Further growth is a possibility, she adds.

"We're always looking—the right opportunity or the right contiguous territory," she says. "I wouldn't jump to Ohio and have a lot of dealers between us, because the key is to share resources to make economic sense."

Felosky's father has taught her a lot about business, she says, and she learned a great deal from him through osmosis,

just being in the office each day.

“You learn without even knowing. You don’t even have to be part of it and you know what’s going on,” she says. “You really need to be day-to-day in the operations to know what’s going on. There’s no absentee ownership here, because I don’t think it’d be a good outcome. You have to be here, because if you’re here, your people want to be here.”

Felosky would advise other business leaders to be engaged owners and know the importance of flexibility.

“You have to be there working with your people,” she says. “The only thing constant

is change. If you think things are going to be the way they are today tomorrow, no.”

At home

Felosky and her husband, Gregory, live in a recently built home on Canandaigua Lake. They have three children: Christian, 35; Laura, 33; and Kimberly, 30.

Felosky has served on the board of directors of the Wilmot Cancer Center for three years and enjoys spending time with family and entertaining at her home. She also enjoys golf and gardening in the summer and skiing in the winter—“most anything outside,” she says.

Long-time family friend Richard DiMarzo calls Felosky dynamic, focused and loyal.

“I have great respect for her in a number of ways,” DiMarzo says. “The thing I admire most about her is she’s in a business that’s really male-dominated. She’s not only a dynamic personality, but she’s a strong-willed person.”

He also notes Felosky’s dedication to her family.

“I know enough families that have been in business together that don’t work out. But they’re unique in that way,” he says.

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