



TENACITY, FAMILY VALUES & A LEAP OF FAITH

the **Next Generation**

of  **ATLANTIC**
TNG LLC



Written by Stacey McCarthy

Organizations that operate in a family environment can change in many ways as each generation enters the business. For Atlantic TNG LLC, the next generation alluded to by its name is Megan Kitchner, a third-generation precaster who launched her own division of the family business in 2011 in Sarasota, Florida and has been working hard to ensure the business thrives for many more generations to come.

The business was originally founded as Atlantic Concrete in Pennsylvania in 1969 by Kitchner's grandfather, Jack Ditcher. In 1976, Kitchner's father, Tris Ditcher, moved to Florida and expanded the business there. For nineteen years, Kitchner learned the precast trade from her family until an opportunity



arose to give the Florida division a rebirth when it was on the verge of permanently closing.

“When they decided to shut it, I had some soul searching to do,” said Megan Kitchner, owner and general manager of Atlantic TNG LLC. “But in the end, I felt it was my obligation to take a leap of faith and give it a shot myself. The key would be to take a minimalist approach so the company could survive, so the Florida division went solo and Atlantic TNG was born.”

It was that leap of faith and some strong entrepreneurial roots that proved to be vital to her success.

“I have a really strong attitude,” said Kitchner. “I was raised to believe that attitude is everything, and I’m very tenacious, and I wanted to make it work, so the next thing you know is that we were off and running.”

Today Atlantic TNG manufactures concrete precast storm and sanitary underground utility products. Its clients are located within a 250-mile radius of the Sarasota plant simply because of the sheer size of the infrastructure products it fabricates, and many of those customers come from state work and local municipalities. ►►



► On average, it employs about one hundred people, many of whom have been with the original Atlantic Concrete company since the 1970s, but it also has many new and younger employees whom Kitchner feels are important to ensuring the company continually has a next generation.

“We all know each other and care for each other, and most of our employees are lifers – some have even known me since I was a kid. We’ve been through a lot together, like a family. We’re a good community,” she said.



When she launched into this business venture, Kitchner did not quite know what her plan for the business would be beyond the short-term.

"Originally the goal was to survive, and that was it," she explained. "I had never run a business before but felt I had been working in the industry long enough at that point to have a really good feeling for this business. First, I got the approval of Atlantic Concrete in Pennsylvania and then got some local contractors to talk to me and say that they would definitely give me a chance to work with them." Her drive and having the right people gave the company an excellent start.

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Now, almost ten years later, Kitchner says the goals are constantly changing. With a strong economy behind it for the past few years, the company has been able to focus on improving the business overall.

"We have tons of compliance issues that we adhere to and pride ourselves in having a good company with happy employees," she said. "Our sales goals are always improving, but for me, it's more about doing the job well and having a safe and happy environment than focusing on the bottom line. Satisfaction takes work."

The materials that are used to build the connectors are chosen for their positive impact on the environment because the company feels that having clean water is essential for the communities in which it works. The materials, along with the high level of customer service and personal touches it provides, are what it feels differentiates it from its competitors.

"We use a variety of connectors to keep our products watertight," explained Kitchner. "The resilient connectors we use are integrally cast in the concrete so that it gives a watertight seal so that nothing leaks out into the environment in order to protect our waterways for generations to come."

The products can include anything from manholes and curb inlets to wet wells and specialty liners, but occasionally it gets to do something a little more unique, such as making a testing tank for the University of Florida Concrete Canoe Competition.

Kitchner's true passion, however, is about more than running a successful business. She wants to give back to the communities she serves, the people who work for her, and the ►►

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► professionals who work in her industry. In 2017, she joined the National Precast Association (NPCA) Leadership Group which consisted of an intensive twelve-month program focused on personal growth and workplace leadership. She followed that with serving two terms as the first female president of the Precast Concrete Structures Association (PCSA) of Florida in 2017 and 2018.

Kitchner also has a management team that knows how important it is to take what they do seriously and who believe in the same culture and values that she possesses. "One way to teach that is by being here every day. The other is by getting involved in our industry," she said. "We are big on constant education and involvement. It makes us a strong team."





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She explained that management all get involved with the local PCSA and NPCA to train the next generation. "Having them go through education and being involved in industry is really important to me. A lot of extra time and money goes into making sure we are involved and stay up on industry trends."

"For me, it's more about doing the job well and having a safe and happy environment than focusing on the bottom line."

The biggest challenge that the company faces is maintaining its personal touch. "We want our customers to feel like we are their partner in precast," said Kitchner. "Their problems are our problems. The team here understands that pressure is part of the job, but handling it doesn't need to be unpleasant; in fact, one of the biggest satisfactions I get is helping someone solve a problem. If you can please customers and employees and feel good about doing it – knowing you did the right thing – there is nothing better."

That is probably why the company does not have to invest heavily in advertising its products. For Atlantic TNG, the best way ➤



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► to reach customers is through its reputation which spreads via word of mouth.

It also does much local charity work to support its communities. "We pick a foundation to donate to and match employee donations for charity regularly," said Kitchner. "We support all sorts of charities that are dear to us such as health issues like cancer, disaster relief, veterans, NephCure Kidney International, SPARCC (Safe Place Rape Crisis Center), Fishing

for Wishes (Make a Wish Foundation), among others. These group efforts makes us all come together, and we feel good about that."

These charitable efforts may not be unique to the business, but the overall corporate culture is not one you would find in most organizations.

"We're unique because we love what we do," she explained. "Sure, we have hard



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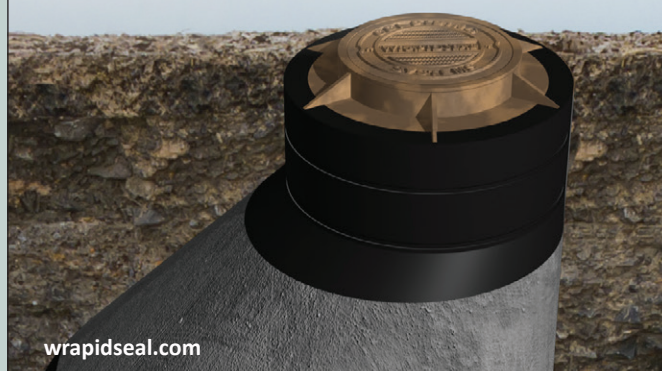
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days like everyone else, but we live, laugh, and overcome challenges together every day. We're strong because we're honest and can feel good about knowing that we not only do good for the company, but also for all our employees, our community, and our environment."

***"We want our customers to feel like
we are their partner in precast."***

Ultimately, the success of Atlantic TNG has come from being able to stay true to the roots that Kitchner established at the beginning. She wanted to differentiate her division of the family business by focusing on the things that mattered to her the most.

"I'm most proud of the leap I took in the beginning and where we are now," Kitchner said. "Running a business is much harder than I imagined, and a manufacturing plant is like a world of its own, but Atlantic TNG is my pride and joy. I couldn't have done it without a strong will, good role models and support, and a great team."

I am sure that Jack Ditcher would say that the next generation of his business has done nothing but make him proud. ■



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