Fast Track in Hawaii

Honolulu’s Ernestine Fischer
Keeps the Pace That Won
Her the Industry’s Top Employee Award

She can teach language arts in the schools, run a contractor association and enjoys reading books on military strategy.

She came into her job to spell a girl friend for a short time, tried out as an assistant—and landed the fulltime job when they saw what she could do.

And how she did do it. In 1977 iaWCC/GDCI named her the industry’s most outstanding employee, honoring her at the annual convention in New Orleans.

She’s Ernestine Fischer, the whiz-bang Executive Secretary of the Gypsum Drywall Contractors of Hawaii, who has posted a series of outstanding achievements in behalf of the 20-plus contractors who are members of her association.

When the Gypsum Drywall Contractors of Hawaii wanted to promote drywall texturing and finishes among the design professionals, they knew they had a top administrator in the Sacramento, California, native. She disappointed no one, and the successful series of educational/public relations meetings went off without a hitch.

In the same manner, she conducts the bid depository operation with the same quick, reliable efficiency and, in general, keeps her association in the forefront among the construction industry community in the islands.

A daughter of retail merchant William Credic and his wife, Pearl Colbert Credic, Ernestine went through the Sacramento public school and junior college system before earning her BA in business and education from San Francisco State.

She spent the next 18 years as a supply supervisor with then federal government at Mather Air Force Base. Then, in 1965, she and her husband, Lawrence, a construction demolition specialist, visited Hawaii—and that was it.

A year later, Ernestine, her husband and their three children, Elizabeth, Francine, and Lorraine, moved permanently to the Islands. They haven’t looked back since.

At first, Ernestine did some substitute teaching in the modern language department of the school system. Later, she agreed to cover for her friend who was doing work for the Gypsum Drywall group.

It wasn’t too long before she was taken on as an assistant and when the fulltime job opened up she moved in smoothly.

Besides her association duties, Ernestine is also on the staff of PSI World, an organization dedicated to helping people achieve their full potential through an accurate and intelligent understanding of themselves and their own mental commitment.

With a decided penchant for military strategy, she plays bridge with all the compassion of a pinless hand grenade, and takes an active part in the...
Hawaii’s Ernestine Fischer serves as a reliable focal center for the Islands’ drywall industry.

Despite a schedule that keeps her stepping, Ernestine found time to talk to CONSTRUCTION DIMENSIONS and discuss what makes construction the exciting and unpredictable phenomenon it is in Hawaii.

DIMENSIONS: Ernestine, the first thing that comes to mind is the woman in an alleged man’s world. Does this give you any problems?

FISCHER: I’m glad you said ‘alleged man’s world.’ Actually, I don’t have any difficulty. Some women, I suppose, do but they cause their own problems. When I go into a meeting with men they don’t treat me with a ‘what’s she doing here?’ type thing. They respect me now for what they know I can do.

DIMENSIONS: Not too long ago, the Hawaiian economy—and especially construction—were reeling along with the rest of the country. Things appear to be moving up. Is that true?

FISCHER: Oh, conditions have much improved in the Islands, just as they have elsewhere. Condominium construction is back at a good pace, and we’re looking for about $2½ million in drywall work in the next two years.

DIMENSIONS: Then the glut of apartments has been absorbed?

FISCHER: They’re selling condo apartments now even before the building is out of the ground. Also, the new laws here require a building to be completed within a reasonable time.

Prior to this new law, say about eight months ago, a speculator could keep his permit active just by doing a little work on the site every 90 days. Now, that’s out.

DIMENSIONS: How about the other Islands? Are they feeling any boom tremors?

FISCHER: There is some work on Maui. But a very strong effort is under way to keep the other Islands from being spoiled by too much, call it civilization. The developers will be having an increasingly difficult time in getting permits.

DIMENSIONS: How has all this yo-yo activity effected the association? Are all your members commercial/industrial contractors—or is there some single house activity involved?

FISCHER: We had 32 members in October of 1977. As a result of the general recession, membership dropped off but now it’s back up again to 22 contractor members and 4 associates.

It’s the smaller contractors in Oahu who do single houses. And don’t look down on the single house market here. It’s important, and it’s what kept many contractors in business during the downturn.

DIMENSIONS: Is the single house contractor a non-union operator as is true in other sections of the country?

FISCHER: There are a few non-union operators, but Hawaii is definitely a union state. The non-union firms are popping up in the smaller outer islands and they could be a challenge in the future.

All of the members in the association are signatory to the union agreement.

DIMENSIONS: There was considerable talk and interest in the series of seminars on drywall finishes that the association did. What was it all about, and how did it work?

FISCHER: We wanted the architects and engineers to know what could be done in drywall technology. So we conducted seminars on textured finishes.

Actually, the objective was broader than just architects. We wanted to teach the general public, general contractors, spec writers as well as the designers. Our subject matter covered knockdown, splatter, spray texture, wallpaper, and painting.

In response to requests for information by design professionals and others, a quick review of the association’s library often produces an answer.

Papers, papers and more papers must be stacked, filed, read and sent out and Hawaii’s Ernestine Fischer faces the same mountain as other association executives.

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**DIMENSIONS:** How did the promotion work? That is, what did you do in sequence so that a contractor might determine if he could duplicate the promotion, if even on a smaller scale?

**FISCHER:** Well, we selected a good site and got out the invitations, aiming each seminar for the specialized audience who would be there. Then exhibits were set up with craftsmen doing the work. We served cocktails and hor d’oeuvres and the audience could stand and talk and ask questions.

The classroom type lectures were conducted and the session was opened up for more detailed questions. Then we adjourned: simple but very, very effective.

**DIMENSIONS:** Will you continue with textured finishes or move onto another subject?

**FISCHER:** Oh, our next promotion will be in light gage steel framing. We’re doing some planning on that subject right now.

**DIMENSIONS:** It appears that you have made a rather valuable impact, at least on designers. Do they expect other functions from the association?

**FISCHER:** Certainly, promotion of the services our members provide is a major objective. But architects do call here on problems, such as fire ratings. I answer when and where I can, but when I don’t know the answer myself I know precisely where to go and get it.

The design professionals also want us to work on standards. That’s done at the national level, of course, but I do try to provide as much coordination here as possible.

**DIMENSIONS:** But still the promotion goes on, is that right?

**FISCHER:** Yes, we do what we can here to promote our industry—and we do it well, too. We’ve now exhibited at the Homebuilders Show, and more recently at the New Food and Products Show.

That makes a total of three seminars and two shows, and we’re planning for more. We don’t bite off too big a chunk-and handle as best we can what we do bite.

**DIMENSIONS:** From an association viewpoint, where do you see trends developing in the next, say, live years?

**FISCHER:** Perhaps we’ll begin promoting the industry where we can actually convince people that a good drywall job can be had for the available dollar. There are many ways of providing a faster, less expensive installation while maintaining acceptable high quality and we will be trying to communicate this.

In the final analysis, though, it’s really service, isn’t it? And that means bringing the public together with a quality contractor.

That means everyone gets a fair shake.