

IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

Story by Emily Baccam,
photography by Grace Brown

Baseball: it's a man's world. From the players and coaches to equipment manufacturers, the sport is dominated by men. This makes the women of Tanner's Team Sports in Hot Springs stand out like the Yankees' pinstriped uniforms.

Approximately half of the premier tennis, baseball and pickleball equipment manufacturing company's 26 Hot Springs employees are women. Eight out of 12 leadership positions are held by women. Three of the five top-level positions are filled by women.

Jeannie Stringer serves as chief operating officer, Tabitha McPherson as vice president of operations, Sheila Lamera as customer service and logistics manager, Gina Andrews as accounting manager and human resources, Jenna Tackett as marketing and digital media manager, Alicia Irwin as accounts specialist, and Tasha Hunn as production manager.

"This group of women, we back each other up and we get to where we think alike and almost finish each other's sentences, so as a force together, we're a force to be reckoned with," said Stringer.

The female-lead team gave significant credit to company President Vince Signorelli for the current female leadership.

"I think one of the main things is how Vince has treated the company. He totally believes in promoting from within and creating talent. He allows everyone



to grow as much as they want. Like with me, I came in as a controller 10 years ago, which is typically a female role. I wanted to move up, and Vince recognized that, that I wanted to grow in the company and he allowed me to do so," said Stringer.

Along with Signorelli's views on promotion, the

ladies also felt that qualities that many women possess make them uniquely suited for management positions within not just Tanner's, but in any company.

"As women, I think we're great communicators, as well. Our counterparts aren't always like that, especially in a male-driven industry. I think that's one

Bone's

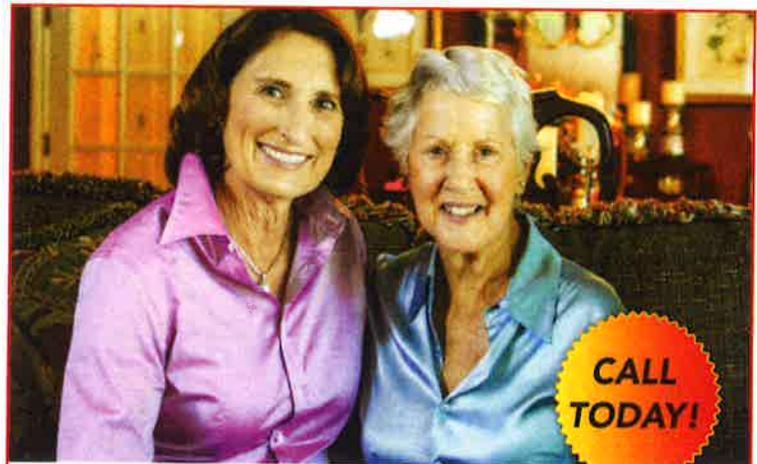
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of the biggest things that any company could learn from us," Stringer said.

Despite the assets the women on the team bring to Tanner's, they have faced sexism in the industry from those at other businesses.

"I think the issues I've had have been very subtle, mostly when we first started dealing with executives from other companies. Maybe they're not used to having a woman in my position," said Stringer.

Irwin shared that she has had customers try to avoid or bypass her to ask a male co-worker the exact same question instead. She felt this was due to the

fact that she is a woman, and they felt she would not know the answer.

The Tanner's ladies have found several ways to nip this discrimination in the bud.

"Educate yourself. That will take you a long way because as you go you learn more and more and more. Just get out there and do it," said Lamera.

Stringer had some words of wisdom and advice for any women considering making a career in the sports industry.

"Don't let yourself be bullied around. Stand straight, look people in the eye. Use every bit of intelligence and tools that you have, which are

many, and just go for it," she said.

The leading ladies of Tanner's feel that the attitude mentioned by Irwin has quite a bit to do with the advancement of women in their field in recent years.

"It's indicative of a larger movement that's happening. It's not just happening in sports. There are more women going into lots and lots of other fields. I just think at some point we decided that it was OK to do exactly what we want," said Tackett.

"You don't have to be boxed in by the normal, stereotypical career path or what was traditionally expected for your life course to take," said Lamera.

"I don't know if we tend to get more respect from our peers and the men of other companies, but I think it's something that makes them stop and go 'Hmm.' It's not a boys' club anymore. The marketplace has come to see us as a force, and together we're a force of strong women getting things done," said Stringer. ♦

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