Connie Sumara: A Force of Nature

In 1986 Connie Sumara was becoming burned out in the real estate market and turned to an employment agency looking for a nice job that wouldn’t creep outside the 9-5 window of time she spent on-site. They sent her to a rail shop specializing in covered hoppers.

“I didn’t know what a covered hopper was at the time but I thought, ‘Let’s give it a shot!'” chuckles Connie.

She was hired on October 6th to replace Bob Oates, CFCL’s original Office Manager, who was retiring after 42 years of service with the company. They were big shoes to fill so, when Connie arrived on her first day, she was feeling a little apprehensive, but that didn’t last long. She was immediately greeted by the head of the company.

“I walked in and he jumped up and came running out of his office with his hands extended and said, ‘My name’s Fred Sasser, and I’m so excited to meet you,’ and I was floored! Walking into Chicago Freight Car Leasing was not like walking into the real world. You felt like you were walking into a warm hug every day. Everybody was very social and very friendly and very interested in their co-workers and what they were doing.”

In those first days Connie was handed a 50-pound ledger book and a pencil, as that was how the books and records were done at CFCL at the time. Over the years, as Connie exceeded her responsibilities as Office Manager, she was given the title of Director of Operations, and then VP of Operations. As the company grew and this job became more than one person could handle, Connie was made VP of Customer Support, where she maintained the level of service on which all Sasser businesses stake their reputations. Connie is proud to be the first woman to reach this level of achievement within the company, and looks forward to seeing others follow in her footsteps.

Connie also became very involved in the League of Railway Industry Women and has served as both Vice President and President over the years. This organization gets women out from behind their desks and into the field, where they can learn the real nuts and bolts of the rail industry and can see the bigger picture of what they’re working on at their desks every day.

In November of 2012, Connie retired after 26 years with the company and is looking forward to traveling to visit her grandchildren in Connecticut and many friends scattered across the country. She will continue her participation on the board of the League of Railway Industry Women and as a volunteer for Operation Lifesaver, where she gives presentations on general rail safety and gate crossing safety to driver education classes. “Connie was the office matriarch,” says Fred’s wife, Pam Sasser. “Whatever Fred needed done, Connie made it happen. He trusted her completely with business and personal matters.”

Like so many long-term members of the Sasser extended family, Connie was more than an employee. She and Pam clicked right away and became good friends. Over the years, Connie helped out when Fred and Pam had to travel on business by staying at the house with the kids, who called her “Auntie Connie.”

“I look at them today, all of them,” says Connie, “and I’m wowed by their individual accomplishments.”

We hope Connie knows how many ways she contributed. We love you Auntie Connie!