



Lou Fusz Ford of Highland, formerly Tri-Ford.

Ford dealer gains new name, but the familiar faces remain

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

The original threesome at Tri-Ford has given away to one big name — Lou Fusz Ford of Highland.

The longtime family owned and operated business was sold to the Fusz auto network as of May 10.

Eric Rehkemper, formerly the president of Tri-Ford, is now general manager.

All 37 employees remain on the job. "They didn't change one employee," Rehkemper said. "They kept the company just as you see it. They liked what we do, and they love our customer satisfaction. They love how we're involved in the community. They really didn't want to change that. They just wanted to grow their company."

It is, however, a big change historically for a business that opened more than 52 years ago. Three longtime friends went in on the business and all were familiar in Highland.

They were: Dave Rehkemper, Eric's father; Ed Moenster, Eric's uncle; and a local insurance agent, Clint Rogier.

Dave was a barber, which made him pretty good at sales, his son said. Moenster was a local mechanic, which made him good in the back end of the business. (Moenster's wife and Eric Rehkemper's mother were sisters.)

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ASCE presidency new chapter in engineer's extraordinary life

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

Glen Carbon resident Marsia "Marsie" Geldert-Murphey has her feet firmly planted in a profession that focuses on working from the ground up. Come this fall, she'll be looking at it from a new perspective. Geldert-Murphey is the newly chosen president-elect of the American Society of Civil Engineers for the 2023-2024 term, after a monthlong election that closed June 1. She will be sworn in this October as president-elect in annual convention ceremonies in Anaheim, Cal., and then in October 2023 will be sworn in as president at the convention to be held in Chicago. She will have a three-year obligation on the board, with the last year being served as past president. Geldert-Murphey, 57, is currently chair of ASCE's Public Policy and Practice Committee, which coordinates public policy and government relations activities affecting the civil engineering profession. Specializing in transportation and geotechnical engineering, she is currently the regional director for Missouri and Illinois for the Lochmueller Group Inc., a Midwestern consulting firm.

The Society president serves as the chief representative and spokesperson for the group, working with ASCE's executive director. The president chairs the Board of Direction and the Executive Committee and assists in educating and motivating members and potential members by promoting Society principles, policies and goals. Geldert-Murphey has led an extraordinary life, with a string of professional successes — and a personal tragedy that nearly cost her life. In 2016, she was severely injured in a freak elevator incident that required many months of recovery. Geldert-Murphey, who holds P.E., and F. ASCE certifications, has been actively involved in ASCE for 32 years. She served on the ASCE Board of Direction from 2016–2019 as the Region 7 director. The region is comprised of South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming and the southwest part of Illinois, where she lives and works. She began her leadership within the Society as president of ASCE's St. Louis Section in 2006 and as Region 7 governor from 2009-2013. Committees have kept her busy with programs, finance, leader training, diversity and mentorship. ■ See ENGINEER, Page 2

State agency helps tout Southwestern Illinois

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

A state economic development association that has spent months studying Southwestern Illinois concludes the area is ripe

for growth.

Intersect Il-

linois is focused

on bringing new

businesses, jobs and investment

to the state by collaborating

with industry,



Seals

academic, civic, and government partners to deliver a unified approach.

Representatives focused intently this past month on Metro East. They accompanied local officials and outside business consultants on a "familiarization tour" of sites to see what's already being done to attract companies.

Intersect's challenge is the same as every community's — and each of the 50 states. That is, overcoming obstacles — including sometimes misleading perceptions — that block economic development.

CEO Dan Seals, who came aboard last September, said Intersect is the only organization in the state whose mission is to attract new jobs and investment to the entire state.

"Our strategy has been to lean in to attracting new business rather than waiting for business to come to us," Seals said.

Intersect's board also named a coordinator of Downstate efforts. He is Robert Stephan, a Godfrey native long active in governmental affairs and strategic communication.

Since 2016, Intersect has served as the state's public/private development arm.

Right now, it is operating off a \$3 million a year state grant and contributions from the private sector. It's been credited with helping lure \$4.7 billion in investment and 15,800 jobs.

"We work in partnership with local communities," Seals said. "Our focus is the top of the funnel. We'll bring the companies into the state and partner with local communities to actually win that business."

In April, Intersect launched a marketing campaign called, "Be in Illinois." It targets companies that would mesh well with what Seals said are the state's unique strengths.

"You can't chase everything. We've gone through the data and looked at which industry clusters we are most competitive in and focused on those."

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News veteran named editor of Illinois Business Journal

Melissa Crockett Meske, a veteran journalist and business executive in Southwestern Illinois, has been named editor



of the Illinois Business Journal. Greg Hoskins, pub-

held by Dennis

Greg A J Hoskins, publisher of Better along

ter in Alton. Formerly an adjunct faculty member in the Business Division at Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey, she also managed the college's workbased learning initiative for many years.

A Jerseyville native, she now makes her home in Bunker Hill along with husband Kevin.



Meske

Grubaugh, who is scaling back responsibilities in preparation for retirement.

"We've found the right editor for the IBJ," Hoskins said. "She knows this market, she knows the news business and she has a passion for the issues that drive progress in the region."

Meske will also hold a dual role advising the editorial team at the Times-Tribune, a Madison County-based, weekly publication owned by Better Newspapers.

As longtime owner of her own content-creation business, Meske has published pieces in many of the region's newspapers, including the IBJ. She has worked as reporter/editor for AdVantage News in Godfrey and as regional editor for the former Campbell Publications in Jerseyville. At one time, Meske also served as executive director of Jacoby Arts Cen"I am looking forward to this opportunity in front of me, working with Better Newspapers and their publications of the Illinois Business Journal and the Times-Tribune," Meske said. "I am honored to be following in the footsteps of Dennis Grubaugh, a force in the world of journalism and a true mentor to me throughout my career."

Grubaugh and partner Alan Ortbals sold the Illinois Business Journal to Better Newspapers in May 2019. Ortbals retired at the time, while Grubaugh agreed to stay as editor until closer to retirement.

Meske holds a master's degree in organizational management and a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership. She said she looks forward to the challenge of working with both papers.

"I look forward to helping the Troy editorial team shape each edition into an even stronger, go-to news source. The future of both publications, and of the company, is exciting and bright, and I am thrilled about being a part of it all," she said.

INTERSECT ······

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There are six clusters: manufacturing, electric vehicles, technology, agribusinesses, life sciences, and logistics.

Southwestern Illinois is particularly strong in logistics and manufacturing, he said.

The campaign, which is mainly conducted outside the state, is "getting a great reaction from consultants who can help us in the recruitment as well as from interested businesses," he said.

During the recent tour, consultants were able to see highlights, courtesy of executives from Intersect Illinois and, among others, Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois, an organization that advocates on behalf of issues affecting economic development.

The consultants were from California, South Carolina and Texas.

Stephan, who is the vice president of Downstate Relations for Intersect Illinois, said there are two ways to get eyes on the Land of Lincoln.

"One is, we can take our case to the decision makers. The other way is to bring the decision makers to Illinois," Stephan said.

The tour's stops included the Boeing project at MidAmerica St. Louis Airport

ENGINEER

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Founded in 1852, the American Society of Civil Engineers represents more than 150,000 civil engineers worldwide and is America's oldest national engineering society.

The ASCE is active in lobbying efforts before Congress. It produces an Infrastructure Report Card every four years. The Society had a strong voice in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed by Congress this year.

"Some 48 of our recommendations were almost verbatim in the law," said Geldert-Murphey, who earned her Bachelor of Science in civil engineering at South Dakota State University. She earned her Master of Science in geotechnical civil engineering at University of Missouri Science and Technology.

The Illinois Department of Transportation interviewed her for potential employment while she was still a student in South Dakota.

"Back in the day, IDOT had a really good rotation program where you served a certain period of time in each of the departments. I started out in construction, on the biggest construction project in the state at the time, with the Clark Bridge (in Alton)," she said. Her next rotation took her to design

in Mascoutah; the logistics valley in Edwardsville and Pontoon Beach; and the heavy industrial corridor along Illinois Route 3 in and outside of Granite City.

The director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, with which Intersect works closely, was present at one of the stops, at America's Central Port in Granite City. It was a large group of community leaders.

"We also had business represented there," Seals said. "It's important for site selection consultants to hear directly from local business." Among those who spoke was a Boeing executive. Such conversations are often "unfiltered" and "go a long way" toward an accurate picture of the business environment.

The site tour started on a Sunday and ended on a Tuesday morning. Consultants have said they would share the details through their networks.

"This is about bringing business to Southwestern Illinois. I'm hoping the consultants, and the folks who read their summaries, will give us looks at projects we can compete for," Seals said.

There are thousands of companies that can be recruited, and the trick is to have as much knowledge in hand as

She spent eight years at IDOT, from

1992 to 2000. While there she earned her

master's degree in geotechnical engineer-

In 2000 she went to SCI Engineer-

In 2006, she and Geri Boyer part-

She is originally from South Da-

kota, and her parents had taken sick,

forcing her to travel back and forth to

the state. She took a year away from

In 2013, she started another com-

pany, Sequoia Engineering and Environ-

mental, in St. Louis. It was during that

working period that the freak incident

It occurred March 17, 2016. She

was in Washington, D.C., advocating on

behalf of ASCE on Capitol Hill. She'd

gone back to her hotel to hook up her

upper floor elevator. What happened

computer, left her room and entered the

with the elevator changed her life.

the profession and during that time

became more active with ASCE.

nered to form Kaskaskia Engineering

Group. Geldert-Murphey was there

until 2012 when she sold her por-

tion of the business to her partner.

ing at University of Missouri at Rolla.

ing, her first role in a consulting firm,

specializing in geotechnical engi-

neering. There, she made partner.

possible while making the overtures.

Illinois Business Journal

"There is some art, and some science to it," Seals said. One asset he cited was Intersect's research team. Members will look at a particular recruitment sector and identify the top companies in it. Software helps them see which companies are looking to move or expand.

"Then, we market to them," Seals said. "We will call them directly, we'll email them directly. We'll post ads that they will see — all inviting them to learn more about Illinois."

Some of the challenge, of course, is perspective. Illinois often gets maligned as a bad place for business because of taxes, bureaucracy and politics.

"That's a big issue for me. One of our biggest challenges is our perception of ourselves. You don't get the fifth-largest economy in the country - the 18th largest on the planet -— by being a bad place to do business."

There are 36 Fortune 500 companies based in Illinois, he said.

"Getting people to understand that our assets far outweigh our liabilities is a big piece of getting ambassadors for this state," Seals said.

thing happened on the way down.

I had a head injury, a back injury -

pened. It's never been explained.'

was in a coma for eight days. She

has no memory of the events.

ground floor, and I was incapacitated.

and they don't really know what hap-

She suffered a skull fracture and

She hired attorneys to look into the in-

cident, but the findings were inconclusive.

"They couldn't find anything that

showed the elevator malfunctioned. It

didn't appear that I was attacked. So,

The orthopedic surgeon who basi-

they don't really know what happened.

injuries were consistent with those he

had seen in car accidents," she said.

cally put my spine back together said the

walk and talk all over again. The physical

therapy continued for the next year. Then

At the time of the elevator incident,

Geldert-Murphey had already sold Sequoia

followed seven surgeries on her spine.

Engineering to another local firm, Gon-

zalez Companies. Part of the acquisition

involved her establishing two new lines

of business, Geotech and NEPA Services,

which she did. Afterward, she had a year

during which she again had a noncompete

Brain trauma left her having to learn to

People need to better appreciate the

"The elevator doors opened on the

fact that Illinois has a central location, a skilled workforce, and "fantastic" infrastructure. The state is the only one where all seven Class I railroads pass through.

"By the way, six of those Class I railroads meet in Southwestern Illinois. That is a fantastic asset that we have."

Forty-three percent of Illinoisans have a bachelor's degree or better, he said.

"University of Illinois alone graduates more engineers than Caltech, Stanford and MIT combined, every single year," Seals said.

The campaign launched in early April. He said it will be some time before any successes connected to it are realized.

"This is a long cycle business. Most projects take six to 18 months to come fruition. I'm hopeful that as we get into late this year or early next that we'll see some of the fruits of these efforts."

He said the agency has "projects in the pipeline for Downstate Illinois that we're hoping to announce in the coming months."

Nondisclosure agreements prohibit him from getting in to many details, but prospects fall into the manufacturing sector.

involving a restricted geographic area. She had to leave the roadway industry.

She went to work as chief operating officer for Jim Taylor Roofing. It was a totally different industry than she'd been accustomed.

"Lochmueller called me (about going to work) literally a week before my noncompete expired," she said. She hadn't been tracking the date, but Lochmueller was aware of it. Initially she turned them down, then reconsidered, after executive changes were underway at Taylor.

That was 2018; she remains at Lochmueller today.

Lochmueller is a Midwest company headquartered in Indiana. Geldert-Murphey is in charge of its Illinois and Missouri operations. She has a desk in both the St. Louis and Troy, Ill., offices.

"I've always been blessed. I've always been able to land on my feet," she said.

She's written three books on her many life experiences. One is called, "Cross, Yield or Burn – Navigating the Bridges of Life." It encompassed the ups and downs of the years when she faced the strain of both her parents' deaths in 2011 and the fact that she had small children at home, while running a business.

next remains a blur to this day. Some-

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