

**MAKING IT
IN NORTHERN
MICHIGAN**

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Who knew they made it here?

BY CLARK MILLER

Elizabeth Doering, a commercial banker by trade, used to study all sorts of businesses. She wanted to figure out what made them succeed and what caused them to fail.

That background served her well when she decided to buy her own business three years ago. Seeking a strong track record and potential for growth, she decided to purchase IMM, Inc., a Grayling-based commercial construction/installation firm. It was a well-timed decision.



Industrial Building Boom

A hard-to-miss industrial boom in the northeastern half of the Lower Peninsula has provided IMM with plenty of work. The one-two punch of work crews in the field and experienced metal fabrication staff back in its Grayling facility has served the company well.

Wood product giant Arauco's \$400 million Grayling project, which will result in the largest particle board and lamination plant in the U.S., is a case in point. Several vendors at the construction site use Doering's company for installation projects and also for workarounds when parts of the plant

arrive but don't quite work as expected. Doering anticipates that at least two furniture makers will locate plants close by the new plant.

Adding to the list of major projects, EJ (formerly known as East Jordan Iron Works) is building a new foundry in Elmira, just 13 miles from its longtime location in East Jordan.

Steady Jobs

Doering is especially proud that since buying the company, IMM has not laid off any regular employees – something that occurred in the past.

Steady work is a morale builder, she said.

"This allows employees to plan their vacations and take care of their families," Doering said.

To supplement its workforce, the company also hires a few temporary workers. Currently, IMM has 41 permanent positions and up to nine temp workers. If growth continues, Doering said IMM might add permanent jobs.

Training

Doering said she also understands the benefits of cross-training. Projects con-

tinue to move forward even during vacation times. It also increases IMM's flexibility, which is a plus when larger projects come along.

She has put a premium on skill and safety training.

One employee is now a certified crane operator, something achieved in advance of current federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) deadlines. Once a month, a trainer visits IMM and makes a presentation on safe work practices. Workers can now become certified welders.



"Also, a large portion of our field crew has completed OSHA 30-hour construction training," Doering said. "We want them know how to work safely and protect each other."

Competitive Standing

Focusing on steady employment, safety and skill training and major projects here and as far away as Idaho improves IMM's competitive standing, said Doering.

"I'm very optimistic about the future," she said. "We have a good diversity of suppliers, so that helps us get competitive pricing. We have a wonderful team. They work well together. And we're growing."

The banker-turned-industrialist is also working to certify IMM as a woman-owned company.