

ChemDesign's refreshed culture and benefits make for a

# growing

female workforce

## The ladies of ChemDesign

Lauren Anderson.....Process Chemist  
Erica Beaumier .....Building Manager B-69  
Alison Cox .....Lab Instrument Technician  
Shelly Derouin.....Administration, Supv. Office  
Mindy Doubek .....QC Lab Manager  
Kaylyn Gustafson .....HR Generalist  
Cheryl Harris.....Accounts Payable/Payroll  
Trudi Janquart.....Customer Relations Manager  
Vicki Kasper .....Benefits Administrator  
Abigail Mehan .....Marketing Coordinator  
Wendy Michalik .....Customer Service Assistant  
Tina Odea.....Materials Manager  
Julia Possi.....HES  
Gretchen Smith.....Staff Accountant  
Wendy Swanson.....Buyer

### Chemical Operators

Brittany Becker	Lauren Bower
Regan Daley	Della Foley
Christine Ames	Chrissy Lynch
Lindsay Chinn	QC LAB:
Jen Bowman	Kelly Fellion
Desirae Detemple	Brittney Hafeman
Jenny Poquette	Alison Cox
Katie Myers	Kayleigh Lemery
Jackie Glover	Kelly Prochaska
Kristine Miron	Maddie Mielke
Cheyenne Moffatt	

**Della Foley** worked in industrial manufacturing.

**Erica Beaumier** was a lecturer for 10 years at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay.

**Chrissy Lynch** worked in retail for 25 years before her store closed.

**Lindsay Chinn** worked in sanitation.

**Brittany Becker** and **Regan Daley** worked together in a nursing home.

**Jackie Glover** worked in many roles, including manufacturing.

The list of varying backgrounds goes on and on.

So, what do all these ladies have in common? They all found a new career in an unsuspecting field – specialty chemical manufacturing. These are the women who make up about a third of the staff at ChemDesign, a Marinette, WI-based toll manufacturer and producer of fine chemicals for the agrochemical and specialty chemical markets.

### What's driving the trends?

The key factor bringing these ladies to ChemDesign is the family and team-oriented environment. Good pay, transparent communication and a respectful culture is also underpinning the transformation.

After working on salary in retail and putting in up to 90 hours a week with no overtime pay, Lynch said she was looking for a change. She first learned about ChemDesign when a friend started working at the plant and got 14 days off each month. Her friend was also well-paid and received compensation for the overtime she worked. "I thought, 'Wow! This place actually pays you per hour and pays you good money,'" she said. "That was huge for me with my kids, so I came here to see if I could do the work and have the training, and it's been phenomenal."

### A changing dynamic

Currently, more than 30 percent of the ChemDesign staff is women, with the largest concentration of female employees



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## “It’s refreshing to see diversified groups being drawn to our plant to work”

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working in the lab. But the growing role for women at ChemDesign is on the plant floor as chemical operators. And as the ladies and leadership at ChemDesign will quickly tell you, the new dynamic has been a positive one for the organization.

This most recent wave of females at ChemDesign has brought new experience and perspectives on plant processes, a key benefit of a well-diversified work environment, according to Dave Mielke, ChemDesign President & CEO. “It’s refreshing to see diversified groups being drawn to our plant to work; it means we are providing a place where everyone can collaborate on the same field.”

Due to the culture and excellent training, males and females are capable of being successful at ChemDesign if they are the right fit for the job and the work schedule. “The biggest benefits of diversity in experience is the added ability for the company to draw insights from other fields of work.”

### **The evolution of female operators**

The significant increase in female operators began in full force in 2017. Between 2010-2012, ChemDesign would get 400 to 500 applicants a year, and only one out of two of those would be women. Today, about 35 percent of all applicants are female, according to Brian Bourgeois, Human Resources and Employee Development Manager at ChemDesign.

Out of the 148 employees at ChemDesign today, 88 are chemical operators, and 13 are women. Bourgeois also noted that percentage has been as high as 20 percent.

ChemDesign hasn’t done anything extraordinary to attract women to these jobs, or to specifically recruit women, Bourgeois said. “The real story is that we’ve been trying to build on the employee experience and making sure that we’re creating a good place to work,” he said. “That’s number one.”

In this small, tight-knit community, word of mouth has played a big role in attracting ladies to ChemDesign. “I think what happened was the word really got out in the community about what a great place ChemDesign is to work,” Bourgeois added. “Historically, we’ve been a pretty male-dominant workforce. We’ve had women working here in operations, but maybe one or two at a time, never very many. Then in 2017, we really had a breakthrough.”

One of the women hired in 2017 used social media to promote how great it was work at ChemDesign, Bourgeois said. She also brought in three of her female friends. Then, they started talking, and ChemDesign started seeing more women coming into the workplace. And now the word is out, and women are finding a home at ChemDesign.

Lauren Anderson, a process chemist, said ChemDesign offers an employee referral bonus program, which is another way the company gets many new applicants. Plus, it’s a nice way to reward those who are bringing in new workers.

ChemDesign also has a strong hiring process in place where employees can quickly know if the job is right for them. Vicki Kasper, a Benefits Administrator at ChemDesign, referred the company’s current female operator who has had the longest tenure, Jackie Glover, because she knew she was



tough enough to be the only woman at the plant as a chemical operator. Through a transparent screening process and honesty about the job, ChemDesign has been successful in hiring female employees who are very happy in their positions. “I think that our hiring process is instrumental in finding the right women,” Kasper said.

Glover applied to ChemDesign because she wanted to help send her daughter to college, and she heard about the opportunity through Vicki. Jackie came for the good pay, but her coworkers were one of her primary motivations for staying. “I chose to stay because of the people,” she said. “Everyone is nice here, and it feels good to be at a job that is mentally challenging. It gives me a sense of fulfillment at the end of the day, seeing what I did, or learning something new.”

According to her mentor in training, Jordan Parker, an A level operator, she rose up to the challenge.

“I was excited at first,” Parker said. “However, Jackie really wasn’t any different than any other person I’ve trained. She was a quick learner. Her determination and ability to be proactive stood out; and it allowed her to be a success,” Parker explains. He also noted that Brian’s morning training program, “Breakfast with Bourgeois,” was instrumental.

Bourgeois noted that an effective chemical operator is one that has mechanical aptitude. When it comes to the QC lab, which is

made up of 88 percent women, it takes someone who is fast-paced and can handle a multi-task environment.

### **Training has been key in getting the ladies acclimated to the work environment**

For those who came to ChemDesign from different career paths and are now chemical operators, training has been key.

ChemDesign provides all new employees with a three-week training course, Bourgeois said. This gives them an opportunity to learn every piece of equipment and the processes, and it also provides a level of safety, where the new operators feel comfortable and prepared when they are fully released to work on the floor.

Lauren Bower, who is new to ChemDesign, says having the required training course is really nice. “You go out and see the things you discuss in class, and you get a book that shows you everything you can reference back to later,” she said. “I really like the way they do the training, and no question is a dumb question. You feel comfortable asking anything,” she said.

Foley also noted the importance of following the batch manufacturing recipe. “If you follow the procedure, you will never get hurt,” she said. “The training is really well done.”



### How have the guys taken this influx of female workers?

They took it in stride, Bourgeois said. “There really weren’t any big hiccups.”

There has also been a visible increase in communication, according to multiple sources on the ChemDesign team.

“They have been patient and helpful,” Foley said. She particularly noted that the male members of the team have helped the ladies who might not be as strong as they are, or who can’t reach as far as they can, but they figure it out and work through the challenges as a team. And if strength and height are issues, they work to find employees roles they can do and be productive and happy in.

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Beaumier, who is the only female building manager at ChemDesign, said the dynamic of the crews has changed. “They are better at working together,” she said, “and there is better teamwork and communication. There is just a different way of thinking about things. These ladies bring a different perspective to the table.”

### Making accommodations

One of the biggest challenges with female employees within the first year is their schedules, especially those who have children. But Bourgeois noted this is not just a female issue. More and more families are sharing childcare responsibilities. If an employee makes it past the first year, they don’t see as much turnover.

Mielke echoed this challenge and said the leadership team has been looking at how to address this issue. “It’s not that this isn’t a great place to work, and it’s not that they are worried about working with chemicals. It’s the trouble balancing shift work and getting kids to school. He said one of the considerations they have been exploring is creating a fixed shift in one of the buildings to accommodate those challenges.

Daley said one of the biggest changes made to accommodate the women was with the unisex bathrooms that ChemDesign had to equip for the women. It was also a bit of a culture shock for the guys when the ladies brought in a cute basket of women’s essentials. Another growth was the expansion the previous women’s locker rooms. All employees are required to shower after every shift before leaving the plant, so the company adjusted the locker rooms to accommodate the new employees.

### Excited about the growth of women in the industry

All of the ladies at ChemDesign are excited about the growth and future of women in the chemical field.

Alison Cox, an Instrument Technician in the QC lab, said it is particularly exciting to see the growth of the female workforce at ChemDesign and the value of the company. “It changed my opinion of tenure at ChemDesign,” she said.

## SOCMA supporting women in specialties

With a growing demographic of women in the specialty chemical space, SOCMA in 2019 unveiled its Women in Specialties Peer Group. The first face-to-face meeting was held in February in Fort Worth with more than 40 women in attendance.

Since that time, the group has initiated a Mentorship Program, with Annie Tannhauser, Vice President, Global Quality, Regulatory Affairs and Trade Compliance at Ashland, leading the charge. She spoke directly with the Women in Specialties Peer Group in New Orleans in December and is excited about what this new program will mean for growth and enrichment for Women in Specialties in 2020 and beyond.

“This is a great year for SOCMA with the launch of our Women in Specialties Mentorship Program that will provide women an opportunity to support each other as they continue to grow and strengthen their roles within the specialty and fine chemical industry,” Tannhauser said. “Mentorship improves engagement, visibility and leadership in our workplaces.”

**To learn more about the Women in Specialties Peer Group and the Mentorship Program, contact Samantha Floyd at [sfloyd@socma.org](mailto:sfloyd@socma.org).**