

# BARBARA KELKHOFF RETIRES AFTER 30 YEARS

By Vicki Jones, Editor



Chamberlain Group engineer and industry pioneer answers **10** questions

**B**arbara Kelkhoff started her career as a mechanical engineering co-op student at Caterpillar while attending Bradley University in Illinois. After graduating, she took a project manager position at AT&T Computer Systems. It was here that she discovered her love for compliance testing.

Kelkhoff's duties consisted of testing AT&T computers for worldwide compliance with EMC and Product Safety regulations. The job was, admittedly, not one that she planned for, but once she was given an opportunity to work in the compliance field she was hooked.

After eight years at AT&T, she decided to explore other opportunities. "I was particularly interested in continuing my career in compliance testing. Chamberlain Group (Chamberlain) was seeking a new compliance engineer, and, as they say, the rest is history."

Colin Willmott hired her in 1993. At that time, she was the first female in the engineering department.

Kelkhoff said that there were originally only 30-40 engineers in the department, and when she retired there were over a hundred. Many were women. When we asked how it felt to be the first, she humbly acknowledged that "I was glad to pave the way."

**Kelkhoff retired on April 3, 2023, after 30 years in the gate and door industry. We interviewed the engineering trailblazer to gain more insight.**

## **1 Can you describe the trajectory of your engineering career and the changes you've witnessed along the way?**

It is interesting to see how much has changed in 30 years. When I started at Chamberlain, there was no email or internet, and computers were rare. Compliance work was completed by mail or fax.

I started at Chamberlain as a single compliance engineer coordinating product approvals. Throughout the 30 years, expansions in technology, features, and products meant increased compliance work. Eventually, our compliance team grew to a team of eight.

## **2 What is your favorite part about compliance engineering?**

I especially love combing through the standards. Developing standards was my favorite part of the job because it's all about words. You have to determine a need, put it into writing, and then effectively communicate the information to the industry and customers.

## **3 What do you consider your most influential project?**

There are so many updates that I worked on, and that I think really benefited the industry such as gate operator safety, commercial door operator safety, and unattended operation of residential door operators. But my work to develop the harmonized ANSI/CAN/UL 325 standard and get it published has to be at the top of my list of influential projects.

The industry spent a great deal of time updating ANSI/UL 325 — regularly modifying it for clarity and adding new operator safety features. The Canadian standard at the time was not staying up to date. We worked as a team so that both the U.S. and Canada were working from the same safety standards.

By publishing the harmonized standard, we no longer have to duplicate tasks and separately update each one. After five years of work, there is one standard — ANSI/CAN/UL 325.

## **4 What impresses you most about the industry?**

I was always impressed that even though so many DASMA members are competitors, they would work together as a team to provide the best information and products to the industry and their customers. I believe the adage "more heads are better than one" is true.

## **5 What are your thoughts on being one of the few "technical" women in the industry?**

I am excited to see that the number of women working in technical fields is increasing. I was one of three women in my engineering graduating class, and I was the first female engineer at Chamberlain. I've been mistaken as "the spouse" at trade shows rather than the attendee. But I have seen great and positive changes.

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Many family-owned companies have women (daughters and wives) who have grown up in the industry and are now installers, offices managers, business owners, etc. I am glad to see progress in this area. However, there is still room to develop.

I love finding ways to support young women who are considering a technical field. One of the groups I continue to help in is the National Academy of Engineering. I volunteer to review scholarship essays for their EngineerGirl contests, which are part of a program to promote engineering to junior high and high school girls interested in STEM.



## 6 You were an active participant with DASMA for years. Why was it important for you to be involved?

I have been a DASMA member for most of my 30 years in the industry. When Colin took me to my first meeting in Chicago, the Door Operator Committee group was discussing the UL325 changes for commercial door and gate operators.

I recognized then that being part of DASMA was a great opportunity to work directly on projects with leading manufacturers, to debate industry issues, and ask questions.

Good results are achieved from the quality of industry professionals that attend and the collective knowledge that they bring. People need to participate. If the next generation of participants really grasp the power of contributing and collaboration, then it will add up, and the industry, as well as the community benefits from a great work group product.

Also, technology is in constant development. DASMA works as a team to understand changes, and the organization works together to improve professionalism in our industry. Overall, the DASMA organization is great! Keep the energy up!

## 7 What advice would you give to someone new to the industry?

Network. Knowledge and opportunity come with collaboration. Collaborate with other departments, other companies, and secondary organizations like OSHA, building associations, etc.

## 8 Who is your greatest mentor and what is the most important lesson you learned?

Colin Willmott was a great mentor. He taught me how to critically review information by encouraging me to pay attention and gather all the details. My most recent manager, Tom DeSilvia, really helped me to think strategically and have patience.

## 9 Can you describe your experience working with IDEA and other industry associations?

I worked with IDEA for nine years driving training and helping to continue the development of the certification and accreditation programs. I joined when the programs were at the early stages. I served as the IDEA representative at DASMA meetings advocating, educating, and promoting the programs to members.

Throughout my career, I regularly worked with various associations, including the Product Safety Engineering Society (PSES), The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), and Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Even in retirement I continue to stay involved with many of them.



Kelkhoff showcased her acting skills as the "key witness" in DASMA's Mock Trial.



In 2004, Kelkhoff was recognized by IDA for serving as IDEA president. In 2018, she received the IDEA Daniel R Apple Commitment to Professionalism Award.



## 10 Now that you're retired, is there any unfinished business?

My husband Al and I retired at the same time. We had a personal goal to retire in our 60s so we could focus on our family, church activities, traveling, and hobbies. There is always unfinished business, but I know that there are others who can carry the torch.

I will miss my many industry friends and the comradery that I developed after working at Chamberlain for 30 years.

I am disappointed that I missed my last DASMA Annual Meeting due to a work conflict. I developed many friendships with DASMA colleagues when we worked on committees and attended meetings together for nearly three decades. I consider many of you good friends. ■

## REFLECTIONS FROM PROFESSIONALS IN THE INDUSTRY

"I've worked with Barbara for almost 20 years, and she is the ultimate professional regarding product regulatory activities. The industry has looked to Barbara for guidance because of her expertise on standards and her passion to advance safety regulations. She is highly respected within Chamberlain along with industry organizations and competitors alike. It has been a huge pleasure working with Barbara and learning from her."

- Tom DeSilvia, Chamberlain Group

"Barbara's contributions to improving the industry are countless and her knowledge of our industry's safety standards is irreplaceable. She was always my number one "go to" person whenever I had a regulatory compliance question. I will miss her valued input. Congratulations and enjoy your time with your family!"

- Richard Sedivy, DoorKing