



What's Happening at Martin Door?

An Exclusive Interview With the New Owner

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Editor's Note: At Expo 2014 in Las Vegas, I had the opportunity to meet Gary Nielson, the new president and co-owner of Martin Door. I had recently learned that Mark Stromberg, the previous CEO, was gone, and new owners were in place.

Since Martin Door has a long and storied history in our industry, I approached Gary Nielson to learn more about this acquisition. He agreed to an interview, and he responded to every question we asked.

What is your background?

Gary: I was born and raised in Salt Lake City and graduated from Brigham Young University in 1975 with a B.S. degree in finance with an emphasis in real estate. I am licensed in Utah as a real estate broker, principal lending manager, and general contractor. I have over 40 years of experience in these areas and 20+ years as a general contractor working on various residential and small commercial projects.

Have you been familiar with Martin Door?

Gary: Since Martin Door is based here in Salt Lake, I've known about the company for 40 years. When I bought my first house in 1975, I put a Martin Door on it.

What were the events that led up to you becoming the president of Martin Door?

Gary: Some pretty serendipitous events led to this. In a conversation with a friend of Shane Smith (my business partner), David O. Martin mentioned that he was interested in selling

Martin Door. Shane got word, and he approached me about it.

I looked at it because I had some clients who were in manufacturing, and I initially thought I could bring this opportunity to them. But one day, while I was driving down the street with my wife, she said, "You and Shane should do this."

It hit me like a ton of bricks. It just made sense.

How so?

Gary: I've had some positive experience in manufacturing. Several years ago, I was hired as the director of finance and administration for a manufacturing company in Minneapolis. In three years, I helped turn around that company, increasing sales from \$1.5 million to over \$12 million. I've also had similar turnaround experiences here in Salt Lake.

My partner, Shane, also has a good background with turnarounds. He's been a lawyer for over 35 years, but for the last 12 years, he's been involved with mergers, acquisitions, and consulting.

Realizing that Shane and I were well equipped for the job, we purchased the company, and it's been an amazing experience and a great blessing.

What made the opportunity at Martin appealing to you?

Gary: Martin Door has a reputation as the producer of the highest quality garage doors in the garage door industry. It was simply too good to pass up

the opportunity to be involved with producing a quality product and increasing domestic manufacturing in my own backyard.

Why did you like the idea of increasing domestic manufacturing?

Gary: Over the past 20 years, NAFTA began the dismantling of a lot of manufacturing in the U.S. Many plants went to Mexico and other countries. It also bothers me that we import so many manufactured products from other countries, so I really like the idea of producing American-made products.

When did you officially become the company president?

Gary: I became president on April 1, 2014.

Is that when the purchase was completed?

Gary: No, the purchase occurred in January. Shane and I originally intended to be owners with a smaller role in management. But after the acquisition, we realized that we wanted to take the business in a different direction than where it was going.

So, who now owns the company?

Gary: The company is owned by me and Shane Smith.

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Tell me a little more about Shane Smith.

Gary: Shane was born in Southern California and came to Utah for his education at Brigham Young and its law school, and he has basically stayed here ever since.

He also owns a small firm that manufactures amplifiers for the music industry. In addition, he has experience as a CEO for a company out of Seattle and other business interests.

I understand that there have been a number of changes in the management at Martin Door. Who now makes up the management team at Martin?

Gary: The management team consists of me as president, Shane Smith as executive vice president of strategic development and sales, Robert Scott as vice president of operations and engineering, and Ginny Phommavongsay as senior manager of internal process and quality assurance.

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I understand that all members of the Martin family are no longer involved at Martin Door. What is David O. Martin now doing?

Gary: David Martin is our at-large ambassador, and he is working in our dealer outreach program.

What are some positive changes that you are bringing to Martin Door?

Gary: We have refocused on our founding principles of integrity, honesty, and our partnership with our dealers.

What are you telling your long-time Martin door dealers to reassure them of the future of the company?

Gary: We have a dealer conference in late August to review the changes in the company and update them on some technological innovations designed to improve our manufacturing processes. We just received a patent on these innovations about a week or so ago. The project has been in the works for a couple of years, and we're now ready to roll it out.

What are your immediate plans for the company?

Gary: Our immediate efforts are focused on reinvigorating our dealer base, geographic expansion into new markets in Texas, Nebraska, and North Dakota, and creating some strategic partnerships in Canada and Mexico. ■

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