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Profile of Celeste Volz Ford

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Celeste Volz Ford is the founder and CEO of Stellar Solutions, Inc., a professional engineering services firm with operations in California, Colorado and Washington, DC. Since its inception in 1995, Stellar Solutions has become a recognized leader in the aerospace field by participating in critical government and commercial satellite programs, both national and international. In 1998, Ms. Ford established the Stellar Solutions Foundation to support community-based organizations and charities. The year 2000 saw the launch of Stellar Ventures, a venture investment enterprise and incubator fostering early-stage technology development and market applications. In 2001, Ms. Ford co-founded QuakeFinder, LLC to research, develop and market a technology that will enable global forecasts of seismic activity, and eventually provide customers with an early warning system to detect destructive earthquakes. In 2004, she organized Stellar Solutions Aerospace Ltd based in London to serve customers in overseas markets.

Ms. Ford has received wide recognition in her field, having served on congressional commissions in the aerospace industry as well as on panels focusing on entrepreneurship and women in business. Her career progressed through positions of increasing responsibility preparing her for the key leadership position she holds today. Ms. Ford began her career as a guidance and control engineer for COMSAT (Communications Satellite Corporation) in 1978. She left COMSAT to become a project manager at the Aerospace Corporation, where her work with NASA on the Space Shuttle led to the recognition of "Woman of the Year" in 1984. Ms. Ford then joined Scitor Corporation where she successfully started and grew a satellite launch business area. In 1995, she founded Stellar Solutions and rapidly led it to international prominence as a leading global provider of aerospace engineering expertise.

Ms. Ford earned her BS from the University of Notre Dame and received her MS from Stanford University. She serves on several boards, including Foundry Networks, Bay Microsystems and California Space Authority. She is a member of the University of Notre Dame's Engineering Advisory Council and is involved with the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, American Leadership Forum, United States Space Foundation, National Association of Women Business Owners and Vistage International. She is a frequent speaker at industry events. Celeste and her husband Kevin have three children and are active in their local community.

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1) How did you get started in the satellite business?

My high school was strong in math and science and everyone said I should be an engineer. I looked in the college catalogs and saw Aerospace engineering and thought that sounded perfect as it was totally new information to learn (I did not like the idea of going to college to learn more about the same things I had already learned about i.e. history, biology, English etc.) My first job was as a guidance and control engineer on an international communication satellite in which I was able to get a great overview of the industry as a system engineer. There is nothing like a launch to make you feel like you had a job well done. No other career ever sounded good after that.

2) How have you been involved in changes brought about in or by this business (innovations, technologies, services)?

I've been involved in all sectors of the Aerospace industry. On the commercial front the advancement in communications over the years has had a positive global impact. In the NASA/Civil sector, many spin off technologies from our early Space Shuttle work have had positive impact in medicine, agriculture, automotive, etc. And in Defense and Intelligence…well, I'd tell you but I'd have to shoot you.

3) What do you think was the greatest event/situation/opportunity you experienced?

In retrospect, starting my own company, Stellar Solutions, was the greatest event in my career. We are about to have our 15th anniversary and the ability to focus on high impact work with high impact people has made a "stellar" difference to all of us, the people we work with, and the programs we support.

4) What was the greatest obstacle?

There are no obstacles, only opportunities in disguise.

5) What do you see happening in the next five years in this industry?

Bringing technology from space to solve the world's problems: providing an "unfair advantage" to our military to advance world peace, bringing communications anywhere, anytime for anyone and becoming a space faring nation that "goes where no one has gone before".

6) What advice do you have for women interested in entering the industry?

This is an exciting field where results are measured by what you accomplish, not just the hours you charge which is prevalent in many other fields (accounting, law, etc). There are great opportunities to make a difference and have work/life balance.