

Emerson wrote that a better-built mousetrap attracts the world's attention. In considering Melissa Brown Herkt's career, the adage must be taken to the next level: in her discipline—project management—it is the mousetrap-building process that is improved. Over a 30-year career, Herkt has become a foremost expert on project management, her attention-getting work influencing our global economic life.

Herkt grew up in Gadsden, beginning college at Gadsden State Community College. A scholarship allowed further study at Auburn University. She pursued a civil engineering major, graduating with honors in 1977. She was AU's first female engineering co-op student—the first in a number of her firsts that have shaped women's roles in American industry.

Upon graduation, Herkt worked for Exxon's New Jersey research-and-engineering unit as project engineer. Her standout performance saw her named construction engineer on a \$30 million project in Denmark, the first woman engineer Exxon R&E ever posted overseas. Another project followed in Norway—all this in less time than college required. In 1981, Exxon returned Herkt to the United States as project engineer on a successful \$3 billion project, but travel loomed again as she followed the massive coal mining project to the field as a contracts engineer in Colombia. In the early 1990s, shaken by the *Valdez* disaster, Exxon meticulously selected only its ablest leaders for upcoming assignments. Herkt, a clear choice, returned to Europe as Exxon's first-ever woman construction manager.

After two decades in petrochemicals, Herkt was wooed to Hoffmann-La Roche as project director for one very tough nut: a South Carolina pharmaceutical facility that was two years behind and only half-built. Her reputation was cemented as she put its problems right, then helped present a court case recouping



MELISSA BROWN HERKT
*Sought-After Project Management
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millions in delay-triggered losses. Roche subsequently brought her to Switzerland headquarters.

In 2000, Glaxo Wellcome approached Herkt about becoming vice-president of global project management, a challenge including impending merger with SmithKline Beecham. Assigned to develop a world-class best practices system for "GSK's" capital investment program (\$2 billion annually), Herkt exploited advances in project

management to create a multicultural, multidisciplinary team instituting seamless processes at GSK sites worldwide.

Since 2004, Herkt has presided over Process Systems and Solutions, a division of Emerson Process Management. She directs all division work—for some half-dozen vital industries, approaching \$900 million in annual revenue—overseeing 4,000 employees providing cutting-edge process-improvement solutions. Advising companies in 21 countries, she utilizes her earlier career to make a real difference for them and those they serve.

Herkt received the Construction Industry Institute's 2004 Outstanding Implementer Award, recognizing her leadership at GSK. Former chair of CII's research committee, she serves on its executive committee. She is a past director with the Mascaro Sustainability Institute, promoting green construction. Herkt supports AU financially through an endowed scholarship. She also gives her time and knowledge, serving on AU's Alumni Engineering Council and advising the civil engineering faculty. She received outstanding alumna awards from Gadsden State, AU, and the Chancellor of Alabama's college system.

Herkt and her husband, Robert, who met as colleagues at Exxon, live in Austin, Texas. During a brief break in Ms. Herkt's Exxon affiliation, the couple owned an international trading business.