



THE FACE OF ZIP'S AW DIRECT

Lydia Gessner/Tribune

Jennifer Klassen has been the “first face” people see when they walk into Zip’s AW Direct for the past six years.

KLASSEN IS MUCH MORE THAN JUST A RECEPTIONIST AT NEW HAMPTON MANUFACTURER

BY LYDIA GESSNER
Of the Tribune

She’s the face of the Zip’s AW Direct.

When you first walk into the Zip’s Truck Equipment showroom, you are greeted by Jennifer Klassen, who has been the welcoming face at the company for six years now.

“I greet customers that come into the showroom for Truck Sales, Service, Parts Sales, Finance and Clothing Customization. When customers are in the showroom I am the ‘Customer Concierge.’

“I make sure they are helped and comfortable with their visit and enjoy the ‘Zip’s Experience.’”

Her polite and professional manner with the people she talks to all day, she says, is a reflection of the women in her life who raised her.

“The way you present yourself professionally in the workplace [is a] reflection of my education and upbringing and direction from the other women in my life.”

She also lauds her team members, both men and women, who help her to do her job to the best of her ability every day. She is especially grateful for the support of her fellow “Women in the Workplace.”

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They all work together every day to give customers the “Zip’s Experience” from when they first step inside the showroom doors, enter the parking lot or call on the phone.

Klassen explains their customers are on call 24/7 in the towing industry so they provide them a “home away from home.”

So not only is she the receptionist, but Klassen does so much more to provide the Zip’s Experience.

“Along with other women and men in the office my part is to invoice a lot of the customers orders that our distribution team of women and men pick and ship out every day ... If customers are here in the showroom I can assist them with parts orders and actually invoice them and send them on their way, but as far as people calling, I get them to their parts person or their customer service person to answer any questions.”

Klassen also says she works to provide a positive work environment

for those around her and also helps to take the “Zip’s Experience” on the road.

“I help provide a positive workplace for our truck sales and truck build teams of women and men. I also attend trade shows all over the U.S. throughout the year with our team of Zip’s representatives. We take the ‘Zip’s Experience’ to the customer at convention centers.”

Klassen also explains that their marketing team of men and women work “in-house” and she helps them out in numerous ways.

“I assist in various marketing projects such as: being featured to speak about our promotional products in videos for zips.com, featured in advertisement photos for zipsoutfitters.com [and] lending a helping hand with fundraising events at Zip’s Outfitters.”

Klassen first started out her career working life with a degree in graphic design from Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, which though she doesn’t directly use her degree she is able to see the big picture to help out in many of these

capacities.

Her husband, Jake Klassen, has worked at Zip’s for 29 years, and is how she was first introduced to the company and its owners, at a Christmas party she went to with him 20 years ago. She is appreciative of his full support of them working at the same place and says working alongside other moms and sharing feedback helps her to be an even better mom to their three kids, Kelsey (junior), Hailey (freshman) and Billy Reed (seventh grader).

She found her way to the job she has now, in part from a chance encounter after Soy Basics shut down in the area.

“I had worked at Soy Basics from their start to finish. When I was at the Soy Basics’ auction Paul was there also.

“He saw that [I] was easily talking to business people from all over. He called me up a few days later and said Jenn I need your help, I need you to come work at Zip’s. So here I am at Zip’s!!”

For her the best part of her job is

spending the day connecting with customers and coworkers.

“It’s talking to people everyday not only at Zip’s, but our customers that call in all over the US.”

And even during the pandemic, Zip’s employees continued to provide 24/7 service to their customers.

“We came to work. Someone had to be here for walk-in customers. We never turned any customers away. During the first few weeks we did a lot of business outside ... you know we have a lot of customers come from out of state, so we did our best to keep everyone safe ... they needed their trucks, their service, their parts and we were there to still provide those services to our customers, socially distanced of course,” she says with a smile.

Klassen paused for a moment last week and thought forward to what she is looking forward to most about the future of Zip’s Trucking Equipment.

She’s excited to keep building a relationship with the company in the future and watching it as it grows.

“Watching this business grow into what it is and what it has become ... not only with Zip’s Custom Truck Sales but Zip’s Custom Part Sales now, as well, and watching that grow. I look forward to providing the ‘Zip’s Experience’ for years to come.”



Lydia Gessner/Tribune

Zip's AW Direct truck salesperson Lori Thronson loves the challenge of being a "woman in a man's environment."

LEARNING ON THE GO

THRONDSOON LIVES BY FATHER'S MOTTO AS SHE SELLS TRUCKS FOR ZIP'S AW DIRECT

BY LYDIA GESSNER
Of the Tribune

These past two years for Lori Thronson have been, in a few words, a learning curve.

But in a good way.

The truck sales consultant at Zip's AW Truck has had a lot to learn in her new position, but it's one she loves. She sells tow trucks to customers across the United States, outside of the Midwest.

Thronson describes a truck sales consultant as, "One who creates relationships with customers in order to drive product sales that they need that will benefit their business."

Her biggest challenge?

"Being a woman in a man's environment and learning how to build from scratch, ground up, a new tow truck and everything that goes along with it," she says explaining that is important to know for the job that she does.

"There are 12 people in the equipment sales. They're all men except me," she explained last week.

Thronson says she was told it would take two to four years to learn everything she needs to know, "Big machinery like that is typically a man's forte ... Sometimes it was overwhelming. Here in the last six to nine months, everything's come together and I love it!"

Through challenging times she has relied on her dad's advice to get her through.

"Growing up my dad always told us when we said we can't do something, he said, 'Can't never did nothing.' My parents raised us to be very self-sufficient and independent ... I just pushed through ... and now here I am and I love it."

Thronson says she originally started working in customer service for the first six months at Zip's and then was looking to go into a specialized sales position.

"Initially, I had asked and approached them about being a strategic accessories specialist salesperson. For some reason, they thought I could sell tow trucks instead," she says with a chuckle.

She loves being able to offer her customers the best service Zip's can provide. Her days vary from checking emails and checking their web email sales to training to working with customers over the phone and face-to-face, but no matter what it's all "customer-based" she says.

"In addition, some days I have customers coming and I have to ... make sure all the requirements are satisfied before the customer

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gets here to pick up their equipment and then on the days our customers do come to our facility we like to give them the Zip's family welcome and give them a tour of our facilities... We are very customer-focused."

From taking their customers out to lunch to providing them a place to stay free of charge, Zip's strives to be a family-oriented business and Thronson says she loves this about the company.

"Working for the Rottinghaus family has been amazing! A family-based company that really offers an amazing work environment, I am truly blessed!"

Thronson says she didn't know how much she would truly love this industry until she experienced it for herself.

"The towing industry is a league of its own. The customers are so committed and passionate about their career, I've never seen anything like it! All the stories I have the privilege of hearing about their experiences are out of this world! Most of these people are truly heroes and put themselves in danger every time they go out on a repo or recovery!"

As "a people-person," Thronson says she loves learning as she goes and talking with people along the way, hearing their stories is an added bonus.

"I'm a people-person, I love people. I'm an information sponge whether its facts and figures or people's stories. You can learn something from any person you talk to in any walk of life. I love that."

This includes when she is doing what she loves with her family, friends and coworkers outside of work.

She says she enjoys golfing having previously managed the New Hampton Country Club and

SEE THRONDSOON, 8

Truck sales consultant plans to stay at Zip's

THRONDSO: FROM 5

loves going boating and “being river rats” with her family at their cabin at the Mississippi. She also enjoys volunteering, traveling, spending time with her coworkers and going to her kids’ extracurriculars.

Her family includes her son Dylan, who lives in Riverside, California and her son Justin, who lives in Cresco.

She plans to stay close by, since she has lived in New Hampton since 2012 and says she loves living here.

Having been in customer service since the age of 14, Thronkson says she has truly

found her calling in it.

“I keep coming back to customer service ... it fits me and it's just who I am ... it's my purpose. I never thought I would love this industry as much as I do. ... I'll probably stay here the rest of my life, if they're willing to keep me,” she says with a laugh.

Her goal is to keep learning and keep growing in the future.

“My goal is over the next couple years to keep learning ... keep gaining [more] knowledge to do my job to full capacity in order to satisfy my customers’ needs and for the company ... because if the company's succeeding then we're all succeeding.”