

## On a Powerful Trajectory

ALUMNA'S COMPANY PARTNERS WITH NASA

Even as a child, Kristin Muschett '85 spent a lot of time at HABCO, Inc., the business her father, Henry A. Backmann, founded in 1970. Although she had originally planned to become a news analyst or journalist, Muschett found herself joining her father at HABCO following her graduation from the University of Hartford in 1985. By working in various departments throughout the company, she learned the ins and outs of the business that she would eventually take over.

"I spent several years learning the business from my father, and he was a great mentor," recalls Muschett. "But he was an engineer, and he didn't really have the mindset to take what the company could do and let the outside world know about it. I did."

Indeed, since taking over as CEO in 1998, Muschett has used her keen marketing skills and her deep understanding of HABCO's core competencies—now a manufacturer of testing equipment for the aerospace, fuel cell and commercial industries—to double sales and diversify the business. Along the way, she has developed 22 different product lines that have catapulted HABCO from a statewide to an international level.

This past fall, United Space Alliance, NASA's primary industry partner in human space operations, named HABCO as the recipient of its Space Flight Awareness Supplier Award. Cited for its exceptional work in building and integrating a new control system to test flight hardware for the space shuttle, HABCO is only the 11th company out of 2,000 active suppliers nationwide, and the first in Connecticut, to be so honored.

Former NASA astronaut Loren Shriver arrived to present the award at a special reception held at the company's Glastonbury, Conn., headquarters.

Today, Muschett continues to look ahead. Having increased business by 100 percent between 2000 and 2005, her goal is to double it once again by 2010—and every five years thereafter. Diversification is a key component of her strategy.

"There's still a lot of diversification that can happen for us in aerospace," notes Muschett. "But right now, one of my goals is to gain more ground in the commercial industries—particularly in medical

device testing." HABCO already has a foot in the door, thanks to the development of a catheter tester for Boston Scientific.

Muschett's plans also include her alma mater. In addition to making a \$15,000 donation to the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture's Engineering Applications Center (EAC), HABCO recently sponsored a senior project for mechanical engineering student Eric Brenson '08. Brenson created conceptual designs for a proposed large crane used for jet maintenance that HABCO plans to submit to Lockheed-Martin. Muschett is also working with Professor Devdas Shetty, director of the EAC, and Ray Kimmelblatt, senior development officer, to establish permanent engineering, business and marketing internships.

"In a large company, interns often get lost and receive little direction. In our small company, they have the opportunity to get hands-on experience working directly with me and other managers," says Muschett.

Muschett studied communication at the University of Hartford—invaluable training, she says, that has served her well.

"I had some really good professors who helped me hone my verbal and writing skills," Muschett notes. "Good communication skills are key for a CEO. You really have to be able to get your message across effectively." ■



Kristin Muschett '85 with her NASA award