



## 5th Annual Women in Restoration Award Winner: Cara Driscoll



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In the world of construction, it's no secret the ladies are outnumbered, but data suggests the tide might be turning, and the restoration industry is included. According to 2019 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, just 10% of the construction industry workforce was female. Breaking it down further, of the 10%, more than 75% of those women work in the office. However, despite making up just 10% of the construction workforce, 13% of construction companies are women-owned, and there was 64% growth in women-owned construction companies between 2014 and 2019. Forty-four percent of the top 100 construction companies have women in executive roles, and many restoration companies can say the same.

This is the fifth year of the Women in Restoration Award. It was created to recognize women blazing a trail for their peers in the restoration industry. Over the last five years, thanks to a number of factors, certainly not just this award, a community has grown among women in restoration. We have also seen more women step into bigger roles within the industry as a whole. Here are three quick examples that come to mind:

- Katie Smith, CR, is the president-elect of the Restoration Industry Association (RIA)
- Kristy Cohen is the CEO of the RIA
- Kelly Kambs is the COO of American Technologies, Inc (ATI), the largest family-owned, independent restoration company.

Today, there is a Facebook group dedicated to women in restoration, a special Women in Leadership event during Violand's Executive Summit every June (with the unfortunate but unavoidable exception of this year), all-women panel discussions at conferences, and more.

Women bring a fresh perspective to the world of restoration; they are by nature compassionate, nurturing, and detail-oriented. Recognizing and celebrating women in restoration for who they are as individuals, not who they are in relation to their male counterparts, is why this award was created.

This award is not meant to divide the field. It is certainly not saying these women cannot go up against men in the same positions. We all know women can and are! However, we all can admit the ratio of men-to-women in restoration is highly skewed, and that's not anyone's fault – it's just how industries like ours tend to work. This award is meant to recognize and celebrate good leadership, and celebrate remarkable leading ladies.

## Women in Restoration Quick Links

[Judges](#)  
[Winner](#)  
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Emphasis  
to Hire Women](#)

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## Background of the Women in Restoration Award

The Women in Restoration Award was launched in 2016. This year, 54 women were nominated for the award by fellow industry peers and colleagues. Many were nominated by more than one person; drawing in a total of 102 nomination forms. Each woman boasts at least a decade of experience in the industry. Four industry judges, including myself, carefully read and judge each nomination on six criteria:

1. Thoroughness of the entry
2. Supporting documentation
3. Journey/experience in the industry
4. Job growth and future reach
5. Worthiness of recognition
6. Industry awards and certifications

### Best of the Best Archives

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## Best of the Best 2020

### Cara Driscoll

Technical Director, BELFOR

#### *Industry Service, Awards, Accolades, & Certifications:*

- Dale Carnegie Sales Advantage graduate 2009 – awarded Sales Presentation Champion
- SCRT GA Chapter President (2010-2012)
- IICRC Approved Instructor's Certificate 2004
- 40 hour OSHA HAZMAT certified 2002
- IICRC Master Fire & Smoke Restorer 1997 to current
- IICRC Master Water Restorer 1997 to current
- IICRC Master Textile Cleaner 1997 to current
- IICRC Master Cleaning Technician 1997 to current



### *Professional Associations:*

- Society of Cleaning & Restoration (SCRT)
- Board of Directors (2011-2013)
- Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC)
- BCI Certification Development Committee Member (2018-current)
- Restoration Division Vice Chair (2019-current)
- Restoration Industry Association (RIA)
- Fire Standard, Cleaning Sub-committee member (2015-2016)

Cara's journey starts like many do in restoration and construction: working in the family business. With plans to be a music major, Cara went off to college after working in her family's ChemDry franchises in high school. When music didn't pan out, she found a new passion for business, moved home, took night classes, and got back to work.

"I worked for them for a long time, over a decade," Cara said. "Eventually, my parents started a separate restoration company because, at the time in the early-90's, ChemDry was just strictly carpet cleaning, and my parents saw the need for restoration as well."

Cara plugged away, working for her parents while getting her undergrad degree, and an MBA. She said her parents never gave her a free pass at work because she was their daughter. Instead, Cara had her own van and a helper.

"When I was on call, it was me and a helper, and we are out at midnight moving furniture, sucking water, you know, the whole deal, and I'm just so grateful," Cara explained. "Even today, as I go out and teach people how to do this, I don't think there is anything like actual experience."



## Finding Her Passion

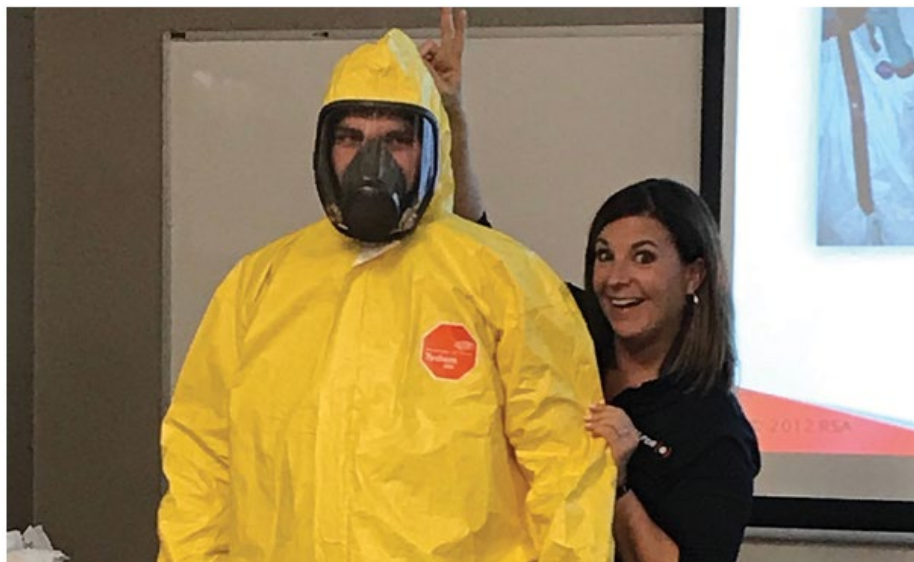
As Cara's knowledge of cleaning and restoration grew, she watched her father, Richard, move into consulting and education. Education was always a big deal in Cara's family, and in their company. As her dad's involvement in the industry grew, other educators like Brandon Burton and Barry Costa made an impression on Cara, and she saw a new path in front of her. By 26 years old, Cara was a WRT instructor for the Restoration Sciences Academy.

As a young, female instructor, Cara caught the attention of some industry colleagues, including a woman who was a store manager for Bridgepoint, and later Jon Don. That friendship led to Cara moving into sales, and becoming Jon Don's Atlanta regional manager.

From there, Cara joined Abatement Technologies, and was charged with launching a new product line for them.

"I was with them for several years as we started manufacturing and selling air movers and dehumidifiers, and really getting them into the restoration side of business," Cara said. "Then, I remember sitting at my desk one day, and things were good, everything was copacetic; there are good opportunities in sales if you're successful, but I just wasn't happy. I came back to teaching is what fulfills me."

That is when Cara made the decision to return to the RSA. At the time, BELFOR used RSA for some of its training, but ultimately the restoration giant needed a full-time instructor, and hired Cara. Today, she is the sole technical trainer for BELFOR in the U.S. and Canada. She teaches all of their IICRC certification classes both in-person and through the company's online training system, and runs their flood house in Ann Arbor, Mich.



## What's Your Favorite Part of Your Job?

"I think I have the best job in the whole entire world, and I tell people that all the time," Cara said with a smile. "I remember years ago hearing Oprah say to figure out what you love to do, then find out a way to get paid to do it, and I can honestly say that has happened."

She has been with BELFOR since 2015, meaning Cara now has many friendships among fellow employees and team members. When she sees a student have a light bulb moment, she is reminded how much she loves her job, and how important education is because our industry moves so fast.

"The restoration industry is go, go, go, and we don't always have time to teach proper information out the field," she said. "So when people get the opportunity to come to class, we start at the very beginning."

Cara also teaches her students that the greatest gift they can give their customers is to bring "calm to calamity."

## Where Does Our Industry Need Growth or Change?

"There are two things that come to mind. First, there could be more technology. Our industry has been around about as long as cell phones have, and look how quickly that technology has advanced with our smartphones, and yet in restoration, we still do some of the things that I was doing back in the field in like 1994," Cara said, while admitting as well, some advancements have been made. For example, there are better programs for moisture mapping, and documentation overall.

The second area she would like to see growth or improvement is in relationships with insurance carriers, saying she finds "our hands are so often tied, and it really fascinates me that they, nowadays, dictate the work that we do, and I have a hard time swallowing that one."

Cara emphasized that we are the professionals and ones trained in property restoration, decontamination, and even reconstruction. She believes that starts with more communication and relationship building, as working together better could save the carriers in the end, rather than everything they're doing up front to try to save money.

**"Cara is an amazing trainer and advocate for the restoration industry because she wants to help people learn this industry so that lives, and not just property, are restored."**

**– Tammy Kleine**

## What Advice Would You Give Fellow Women in Restoration?

“Work hard, first and foremost,” Cara said. “I didn’t get here just by sitting around. I’ve been in the trenches. I responded to Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma, and was not teaching for two years because I was out in the field cleaning up after those huge disasters.”

She admitted the work is hard sometimes, and has hit many glass ceilings during her career so far, but has never changed who she is.

“Don’t give yourself up; find a place where you belong,” she said. “I think women are really intelligent, they have really good ideas ... we’re just totally different in the way we think and operate, and I think that’s great.”