

OSH Generations: Valerie & Matthew Baker

Many OSH professionals have family or close relationships with people who are also in the profession. OSH Generations highlights our members' stories of the people who influenced them to enter the safety profession or those who they inspired to become safety professionals. This is the story of Valerie Baker and her son Matthew Baker, both members of our Northern Ohio Chapter.

Valerie: Safety—A Noble Profession

“Thinking back on the past 35 years and how I got here brings back a flood of fond memories of friends, family and a career that has been most rewarding. I have always had a love for nature and science, specifically chemistry. I thought that I would one day become a chemist or a chemistry teacher. I entered Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) as a chemistry major in 1984, but found myself bored after 2 years while tutoring students looking at fractionating columns. A friend suggested I take an entry-level course in the safety sciences program and at once I loved the application of science, technology, engineering and math (safety is a true STEM profession) on keeping people safe. I switched to the safety science program, which satisfied my interest in chemistry as it applied to industrial hygiene and the health aspect of my EHS career. While at IUP, I also participated in officer roles in the ASSP (then ASSE) student section where we received the Outstanding Student



Valerie at the campus union for ASSE in 1988.

Section of the Year Award in 1989. My experiences allowed me to develop a learning mindset and ASSP has been a big part of my journey.

“My professional life has allowed me fun and rewarding work for major corporations in carbon, chemicals, pharmaceutical manufacturing research, minerals, aluminum casting/forging and, currently, window manufacturing. Over the years, I have developed strong relationships with other phenomenal safety professionals spanning countries and continents, and have learned that there are many perspectives in leading for safety. Earning my CSP certification was an important part of my background as well as ongoing leadership and involvement in our Northern Ohio Chapter.

“The greatest enabler for my career has been my husband, Thomas (married 30 years in August). He left his job in manufacturing to stay home with our kids, Matthew and Melanie, and allowed me to experience international travel and career growth. For that I am forever thankful.”

Matt: Safety Is My Life's Influence

“Growing up I have always had a curious mind and have been fascinated by how things work and are made. My mother was a significant influence when I was trying to figure out what I wanted to study. As a junior in high school, I attended an ASSP Northern Ohio Chapter event with my mother. The area OSHA director was presenting on national emphasis programs and sharing data on workplace fatalities and statistics. I couldn't imagine someone dying while on the job. At this event, I was also able to see some of the tools of the safety trade including lockout/tagout and air monitoring equipment. I attended ASSP technical meetings from



Matt during a HazWOPER training at the University of Findlay.

time to time and interacted with safety professionals, learning how they have made a difference in people's lives.

“At a young age I was also my father's hands-on helper, working around the house and on equipment projects, and I eventually saw the safety connection. I used to think I stumbled into this career path, but looking back, I found my niche through my dad and I coaching each other on the safety rules.

“When deciding which college to attend, I landed at the University of Findlay where I was well prepared for a career path in EHS. I had the opportunity to work with major corporations in appliance manufacturing, the tire and rubber industry and, currently, titanium manufacturing. I continue to advance my career and enjoy the intricacies of deploying safe work practices in complex manufacturing. Most important is my work with other strong safety and manufacturing leaders. I also buckled down and passed the CSP exam and will serve as president of our Northern Ohio Chapter starting in July 2024.

“I am most thankful for the influence of my parents for my strong work ethic and desire for continued growth. I can see a bright future ahead, planning forward for similar roles as my mother and most importantly continuing to make workplaces safe.”

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