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Businesswoman of the Year Awards

OBJ Contributor
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For more than three decades, the Women's Business Network has celebrated the accomplishments of Ottawa's most dynamic female business leaders.



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Luise Sander is the co-president of Sander Geophysics Ltd.

Luise Sander: Flying high in geophysical circles
Current job: Co-president, Sander Geophysics Ltd.
Hometown: Ottawa

"The company is very well-known all around the world for its strong safety culture."

When you're a family-owned business in Ottawa flying airplanes as far away as Antarctica, gaining a customer's trust is a combination of displaying ethics and an impressive safety record.

With zero aviation accidents in its more than five decades in the sky, Sander Geophysics Ltd. stands out in the global airborne geophysical survey sector, says co-president Luise Sander.

The company's fleet of 17 aircraft fly anywhere from 80 metres to 500 metres above frequently mountainous or hilly terrain, searching for oil or conducting environmental surveys, among other applications.

Major projects for the firm now are taking place in Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Colombia, Indonesia and elsewhere around the world. Revenues are not disclosed because the company is privately run, but Ms. Sander says sales are growing yearly. SGL has 160 employees, mostly based out of Ottawa, except for the pilots, who are everywhere in Canada.

“We are known for being ethically solid in the field of airborne sensing and exploration, and for our safety record,” Ms. Sander says. One of its biggest challenges is the paperwork associated with getting airspace approvals, which is where the company’s experience – it has done airborne surveys since 1958 – is an asset.

Although the company is a family business, Ms. Sander began her career in computer programming, briefly working for another firm. She performed several roles at SGL before becoming co-president with her brother Stephan in 2002.

“We grew substantially” during that time, Ms. Sander recalls, saying that one of her main challenges was to implement more structure while keeping the friendly atmosphere of the family business during that time.

“It’s about knowing employees and their strengths,” she adds.

Among Ms. Sander’s most notable charitable contributions is to the Canadian Exploration Geophysical Society Foundation. She has been associated with the foundation for a while, and was elected as a director in March.

The foundation has a mandate to “support, nurture and promote geophysics” for universities, as well as in government and industry, for the aim of scientific advancement.

Nine employees from her company also are volunteer readers with OttawaReads, an Ottawa Network for Education program that pairs employees with local schoolchildren to promote literacy.

– *Elizabeth Howell*