

## EXECUTIVE PROFILE



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# MAKING CONNECTIONS

*Dina Kimble takes charge of family-owned Royal Electric*

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**D**ecades later, Dina Kimble of Royal Electric Co. in Sacramento said she still remembers when the light bulb – metaphorically – went off about her future.

She said her father, Frank Velutini, was taking her on tours of possible colleges to attend when he asked her directly: Have you ever thought about joining the family company?

Kimble had actually been working for Royal Electric since she was 12, doing mostly mundane tasks like filing. But her father's inquiry about joining the family business convinced her to get a construction management degree from Arizona State University. After she graduated in 1998, she joined the company as a project manager. During these early years she worked in different departments and soaked up all the knowledge she could about how the business worked. She was

named a partner in 2012, and five years later was promoted to president. Kimble succeeded her father as Royal's CEO in January 2019, becoming the third generation of her family to run the company.

As Royal Electric celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, Kimble said, she recognizes how much the industry has changed. Project plans scrawled on a napkin used to be nearly good enough; now multiple levels of people have to review and approve documents, she said. And now new employees don't necessarily come from traditional technical or building trades backgrounds.

"Now they just have to have a passion for the work and love the team-building that goes into a project," she said.

Royal Electric specializes in electrical work, often as a subcontractor, for commercial, educational and industrial projects. The company's work goes as far as the Midwestern U.S., though most of it is on the West Coast.

The work variety is one of the aspects that Kimble said she likes most about her job. One day it's a runway project at San Francisco International Airport, the next an apartment building in Oakland, then a new high school in Lincoln and a collaboration for a new building at California State University Chico.

Electrical components are often one piece of larger projects, such as a new spillway for Folsom Dam built a few years ago. Royal Electric put in gears and other equipment, then saw them buried under cement as the new spillway was poured. Kimble called it the project of a lifetime.

Construction firms like Royal Electric didn't lose much steam during the Covid-19 pandemic, as officials deemed their work essential. But they were still faced with finding new employees, which is always a challenge.

Kimble said she formed partnerships with high schools and groups like the Associated General Contractors of California to start building a future employee pipeline

### THE ESSENTIALS

**DINA KIMBLE**

**Age:**  
45

**Education:**  
B.S., construction management, Arizona State University; MBA, University of California Davis

**Career:**  
Royal Electric Co., has held multiple positions since starting in 1998, including president and partner (2017 - 2019) and president and CEO (2019 - present).

**Personal:**  
Married to Darrin Kimble for almost 20 years. The couple has two kids, son Bennett, 16, and daughter Lia, 14.

### Something people would be surprised to know about you:

*I'm proudly named after my great grandmother, Dina, who immigrated from Italy to Sutter Creek. I'm fairly certain I get my strength and perseverance from her (and maybe my Italian passion and stubbornness?).*

**Passion:**  
*Travel abroad, or in our Winnebago across country. Also good cocktails, turning any location into a dance floor, and potato chips!*

and get the word out about career opportunities.

"We don't have 20 years to make someone a superintendent anymore," she said, noting the Great Recession prompted a lot of construction employees to leave the industry. Had they stayed, she said, many workers would have moved up to field leadership and management positions by now.

To help address the ongoing worker shortage, Kimble said, the company has a five-person recruiting team that constantly looks for new people. Royal Electric and other companies have also changed the messaging, emphasizing construction not just as a job with good pay right out of high school, but a potential long-term career, Kimble said.

Another company strategy is pairing younger workers with veteran ones to train and learn processes on the job. One advantage of that, she said, is younger employees ask questions and bring a fresh perspective for their veteran counterparts, making it more of a two-way street.

"Companies like Royal take pride in developing our team and the future workforce," she said. "If we don't share this path with more kids in high school, not only will our industry face a severe workforce shortage, but many kids will miss the chance to do meaningful work they'll love."

Kimble said with Royal Electric's work backlog likely to last for the next 12 to 18 months, the company's outlook is strong. However, she expects to see fewer new office and retail space projects, which are likely to be in less demand because of the pandemic.

Allison Otto, who, like Kimble, recently became the third generation of a family running a company with Otto Construction, said she met Kimble through AGC.

"I value her work ethic and integrity," Otto said, adding the two companies often work together on projects. "I can always call her if there's an issue on a project. There's a willingness there to have tough conversations."

When she started at Royal as not only a member of the family but also a woman, Kimble said, she had to work a little harder to prove herself. Now that she's CEO, she said she can focus more on the company's overall vision and strategy and strengthening relationships. She's also heartened to see a growing number of women assuming top executive positions at other construction companies, which she sees as an opportunity.

"It's more about knowledge sharing and furthering the industry," she said. **Z**