

## COMPANY PROFILE

# Griffom Innovations

**Distinctive Excellence, Passion, Vision and Grace**  
Written By Marie Diane Gerace

**From their location in southwest Oregon, Dwight and Gail Griffin are able to offer diverse products and services to their North American clientele, and they do it in a manner most refreshing, from a location few would expect.**

Getting his start in 1970 as M. Dwight Griffin General Contractor, sole proprietor, Dwight operated as a licensed general contractor and land developer in the state of California, with his wife Gail steadfastly at his side. Armed with electrical and landscape licenses, they specialized in commercial/industrial construction including restaurants, office buildings and business parks. Dwight's father was a residential contractor, so building was in his blood from the start. But who would have ever guessed that he would one day begin exploring over the horizon and start building new worlds? Perhaps I should start at the beginning...

I arrived in Eugene, Oregon, and was greeted at the airport by Dwight and Gail Griffin, and for two days was welcomed into their lives, their town of Glide and into their world of treasures... that is, into their world of solid surface.

Dwight and Gail's story really begins during their childhood together. They have known each other since they were seven years old. Listening to their story was like hearing a fairy tale, complete with the serendipitous anecdotes, as well as the heart breaking absences, touching events, and everything in between. But this would be the stuff of writing great love stories, or biographies, or epic adventurous and heroic tales, and as much as I would love to tell that story, I must keep to the task and keep "their" story to a minimum.

Growing up as neighbors, children from both the families played and lived and learned together. Gail's interests in school leaned toward home economics, while Dwight was actively involved in the long distance strength and endurance disciplines of cross country and track. Enlisting in the United States Marine Corps during Vietnam was a natural course for him to follow. After his initial activities within the engineer division, Dwight felt that there had to be something more "interesting and challenging" and so put in for the Special Forces Long Range Recon unit. Interesting? Certainly. Challenging? Could he have chosen anything more physically, mentally and emotionally taxing and challenging, and into whose elite ranks so very few are even considered, let alone accepted. (I believe the number is 1/100th of a percent of those who apply actually make it into this very special group of marines). To hear of the disciplines that he learned through incredible trials of training, as well as the work he did in the field under incomprehensible conditions, puts me in admiration and awe. Yet to hear Dwight talk, never was there a more humble and modest teller of his tale. And I would be remiss not to mention that even though it was not his intention, Dwight made me feel so very proud to be an American whose welfare was guarded so courageously – even in such a turbulent time as the Vietnam era – by men who were focused and dedicated and who performed their jobs so nobly and with such clear focus. But, back to my article...

In 1982 Dwight and Gail relocated their family (including two lovely daughters) and their business to southwest Oregon, specifically a little piece of heaven on earth named Glide. The commercial application experience enjoyed in California allowed them to diversify from the general construction industry – of which there was very little to be had in Oregon -- to custom cabinets and interiors, effectively redirecting their capacities toward building homes for people they knew, then building for others and then onto interior applications of hardwoods. This eventually led to cabinets and advanced woodworking, which took them to industrialization as a result of doing more commercial





projects. Very quickly they built a reputation for their ability to produce very exclusive interiors and designs out of wood components. And then one day, almost magically, solid surface found its way to Dwight.

A client had brought in a coach requesting it be converted into a "living space." This client had found an interesting piece of material in a warehouse and wanted Dwight to use it for the countertops. Neither Dwight nor the client knew what it was. Dwight called around and talked to a Corian distributor. It was all very vague; Dwight was only told, "Use your imagination and figure out how to work with it." Use your imagination. Those were the magic words. Dwight made the custom coach conversion, the customer loved it, then Dwight went on to make countertops, windowsills and vanities with the new surfacing material. "That's how it started. With Dawn Beige Corian ¾ inches thick. There weren't even joint adhesives in those days, and only five colors to choose from," Dwight mused as he thought back. And that was only the beginning.

Griffform went on to become certified by DuPont and began a close alliance with them that has endured and grown over the years. The time came for the company to turn toward commercial once

more by building a line of children's furniture for school use. Dwight immediately started testing and improving the processes that they used for their furniture lines so that it would be more tool-able for solid surface, building into their process along the way. "We've had a twenty-five year association with this treasure, starting with five shades of white. One of the biggest delights was the introduction of Midnight and Dusk! This gave me a gasp of WOW! And look what we can sell now... there are so many choices, bringing with them a complexity of where to take it and how it can be used, such as the three dimensional innovations. I grew up with the color changes and technical advancements."

Griffform's custom work progressively became more and more the order of the day to the point that fabricators -- when asked for something that is beyond their capabilities or scope of expertise -- will refer their clients to Griffform as their normal course. "We have become a clearing ground for a lot of the artistic elements; elaborate projects that are complicated."

The company enjoys a wonderful reputation in the design industry, and is set up on designer's notes as an advanced fabricator. Possibilities Magazine also lists them as an Advanced Fabricator that has the capacity to deliver many of the different projects featured in their publication, with the idea that people would have someone to turn to for replicating these projects.

proprietary products and components for many different retail and OEM companies. Importantly, it is their adaptability, their open arm welcome to embrace changes when needed, and their limitless capacity as visionaries that have propelled Griffform Innovations to the forefront of the industry, where they do the unthought of successfully. "As the needs of our customer base has changed, so too the company has evolved to better accommodate those needs. As a service oriented company we strive to bring Distinctive Excellence into our approach to any product or service we provide."

When I walked into the showroom of Griffform Innovations I immediately realized the culmination of twenty-five years of working with solid surface. "The industry was barely into distributorship back then. Certainly there was an accelerated learning curve, but the more I learned the more I could do, and the more I could do, the more I did," Dwight stated calmly. In fact, he learned that he could combine thermoforming and machining to make different shapes, sizes and configurations at the customer's request. Case in point, and one of the first items that rendered me nearly speechless, was the solid surface and upholstered dining room chair. This chair has all the design benefits of a "normal" chair -- it can even fold -- and is made of a "renewable" material. Next there was the infant bath, made at the request of the healthcare industry, and is molded to the shape of a baby with back, head and "bottom" rests that prevent the newborn from slipping and sliding about, allowing for hands-free bathing. Griffform introduced this unique product to the American Society of Health Engineers in recognition of their need to have infectious disease control applications. Since introduction, the application has been specified all over the country, and Griffform was recently asked to make a larger model for the extended stay babies. Most recently, at the Surface Fabrication & Design EXPO in Las Vegas this last February, Griffform introduced sinks that can be mounted under any surface, available in varying depths, as well as custom measurements.

One of the most remarkable innovations that I observed were the limited castings that Griffform produces, such as inlaid copper (with a natural patina), silver, and other materials including Griffform's Colorfil applications. Briefly, a piece of solid surface is laser or router engraved, then filled with the Colorfil material, making the entire piece solid surface. Some of the custom colors even produce an iridescent appearance [figure 2] that is quite stunning. Perhaps the most interesting application, at least to me, was how Dwight is able to take a photograph, laser it into the solid surface, fill the etching with Colorfil, and produce a "renewable" photograph! [figure 3] Imagine the concept of a "solid surface within a solid surface renewable photo."

Dwight has the artistic skill and scientific know how to take standard art and make it into different features and elements and put it literally everywhere he chooses. He can then provide the fabricator with a template allowing the part to be cut

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In 1990, Dwight and Gail enlarged their plant facilities and brought in new equipment and technologies, which enabled them to broaden their product base. In 1996 they acquired an additional property and expanded their facilities to total 21,700 square feet at two locations. The diverse and flexible computer design and CNC manufacturing techniques they employ have enabled them to become an industrialized model for the industry. They have become a company that is capable of manufacturing custom items and large production run products simultaneously. Additionally, as a "just in time" company they are able to manufacture



Figure 1



Figure 3

and glued into a wall, or countertop, or wherever they choose. This means that the fabricator can buy a piece of solid surface art and incorporate it into their project, selling it as their own product. What is even better is that Dwight can provide this service at very affordable prices.

Another innovation is Grifform's development of slip resistant solid surface that is easy to take care of. Primarily for use in bathrooms, it is totally safe and goes beyond the standards for slip resistance,

yet is aesthetically pleasing to the eye and to the touch. This is most useful for hospitals – though just as useful in the home – and is being widely used to replace tiles in bathrooms and showers. As well, there were other unusual and beautiful applications on display, such as hair combs [figure 4], jewelry boxes, earrings, switch plates, signage, dedication plaques [figure 5], you name it and Grifform can and will make it. Simply put, I doubt they know the meaning of the words “no” or “impossible.”

I had to ask at one point what extensive engineering training did Dwight have under his belt in order to be able to do the advanced processes that he is capable of. He answered that he was entirely self-taught. “The advantage to being self taught,” Dwight said with a smile, “is that no one in the engineering schools ever had the opportunity to tell me that I couldn't do it. As a result, I never knew there was a limit, and instead went on to break the barriers of what was expected and intended with solid surface.” Bear in mind, however, that this took years and years of dedication to accomplish. “Not knowing barriers, you don't think about limits or what cannot be done. In effect there are no limits or barriers. Your capacity is not hampered. In short, I was not stopped before I got started.” Again, the knowing, humble smile. Dwight went on to tell me that DuPont at one point -- when looking upon one of his innovations -- claimed that the work could not possibly be made of their product, as to bend a dark color that way would produce “white-out” in the product. Simply put, DuPont claimed, it was

not Corian! Dwight politely corrected them, and now DuPont no longer questions him. DuPont recognizes that Grifform is working carefully to perfect products and make them user friendly so everyone in the industry succeeds. “This is part of the process and what we do.”

Grifform is going where the market is, and doing what the market asks for to the benefit of all. “This is what we do. When the market asks for improvement, advancement or expansion, Grifform is happy to go there and deliver. The industry as a whole knows that the product is suitable, but complicated. At the same time they know they can come to Grifform for the process and research to bring their dreams to the marketplace in an affordable and serviceable way.” This is proven by Grifform's 22 products. “We are focused on displacing other materials with solid surface,” Dwight stated with polite, sincere conviction.

The pièce de résistance, which I was especially honored to be shown, was the ER-1, “Bath Pod,” which was commissioned by Congress [figure 1] Grifform was selected by an architectural firm and the Surgeon General's office about four years ago as “the company who could develop the plan, design and supporting documents to create a clean room application where nothing can get in, and nothing can get out -- and the only thing you actually touch is the tissue.” Everything is activated by motion sensor. You want to turn the lights on? Wave your hand. You want to turn the water on or



Figure 5

off? Wave your hand. Flush the toilet? Wave your hand. The unit is sitting in Grifform's showroom awaiting Washington Medical Center to redesign their facility so they can incorporate it into daily service. This project delivers a great deal of interest to the medical and health industries, and has been commissioned on a level that is being researched and tested in an environment to find out what the benefits and shortfalls are -- a test bed of sorts -- to conclude what needs to be changed or modified. The first debut with the ER-1 Bath Pod will be in Washington D.C. at the American Society of Health Engineers International show in late July 2008. This will surely result in opening up an entire new facet to the solid surface industry; new markets, new opportunities, and Dwight is happy to think that people will look at what he does, envision their own ideas and benefit in the process.



There is a lot of difference to where Grifform is going and what they are doing. The scope of what they are doing is presenting opportunity to the world based on what the solid surface product can be. "We are rather like Johnny Appleseed -- planting seed we know we will never harvest -- but still we plant that seed for the industry. The goal is that we make it available so that others can enjoy the fruit of what we're providing. Sure we will benefit from what is happening, but not nearly so much as the industry will down the road in years to come. Grifform has penetrated the barrier of entry for solid surface being used in a broad spectrum of applications in different industries; handrails, toilet partitions, plumbing fixtures, wall cladding, etc. We are spreading and planting everywhere, and the industry will see the propagation of the product that can later be enjoyed as a result." Does this meet their company goals? Well, to know that Grifform's company goals are adding value to their customers, society, the community and economy, I would have to answer that with a big YES.

Grifform has contributed a great deal of research and development in the building of their facility along with the ability to maintain the capacity to expand and produce new products, as well as building upon the technical and educational aspects that are necessary. One of the main benefits Grifform provides for the fabricator is the opportunity to have a product of solid surface to compliment what they already do. In short, the elements that a fabricator cannot produce on their own are produced by Grifform at an affordable cost. This can only amplify a fabricator's opportunity for new markets and new sales, and this can be used as an advantage. Grifform does not consider



Figure 2



Figure 4

themselves as a competitor, but rather they are in the position to compliment and add opportunity for others. Their goal is to contribute and add value to everyone, not to grasp and hold onto things tightly and over-protectively. They have built strong relationships and friendships as a result of their sharing opportunities within the industry so that others can reap the benefits. As well, it is not their goal to fall to the temptation of making more and more money. They simply strive toward their objective of doing what they do with excellence, providing benefit to those that they serve. "If we can do that, the other things – like money – come as a direct result. Money is not the objective."



Dwight loves to share and help others learn and glean from their visit to their facility. He can present solid surface in such a way that people are amazed at what the product can do. Dwight's contributions to the industry, to the association and to the world at large are remarkable, and he sums it up quite simply and to the point: "A person cannot go wrong in life by helping others. We are more blessed to give than to receive. When we give with a pure heart we receive many more benefits and gratification than when we are seeking primarily to receive. The same applies here. There are many who would disallow for what I am about to say, but I'll say it: We were designed with the capacity to create, to develop, and to work. There is an enormous amount of satisfaction being able to say I worked well, produced well." And Dwight makes sure that his employees feel good about what they have done. "All the other things that are benefits, such as health care, salaries, etc., cannot compare to leaving work with a feeling of satisfaction. That is the ultimate benefit. That what you have done has added value, and that you are happy."

The most interesting thing at any given moment for Dwight is the process, or application of the moment that is capturing his attention and passion. This may be a particular project he is researching -- or actually in the process of creating -- to a conversation he is having with an employee. "The plant is a living organism, the facility, the people that work here, everything is continually evolving. This happens because we all apply ourselves thoroughly."

Dwight's employees are of a like mind in that they adhere to the company goals and vision, and truly enjoy what they are doing. They meet with Dwight regularly to discuss values, objectives, philosophy

and the things that are pertinent to them in where and what is happening with business and their customers. Dwight's employees are part of a family that enjoys the open communication required within the complex operations of the facility. The family is small but effective, a credit to Dwight's strike force training. "More doesn't always mean more. Bigger doesn't necessarily mean better. Moving accurately and quickly, delivering faster than competitors, accomplishing the task without waste or underutilization of assets. Coordination and organization make it work, not an overly large operation with too much paperwork and too many employees that can often result in chaos. With a smaller workforce people are able to respond

when needed during crisis management times when they surface. Our capacity to respond is not encumbered because we have stayed small. High mobility, quick set up, producing quickly and serving a geographic need can be done efficiently and profitably." And, Griffform Innovations has the ability to set a standard where the industry is going, including offering plumbing fixtures which are certified by NAHB Research Center and are able to provide these certified products to the fabricator.

As we left for our one and a half hour drive back to the airport in Eugene my attention was directed to majestic Mt. Scott overlooking the quaint little town of Glide. I will forever associate Griffform with that mountain. Griffform is piercing the cloud cover to new heights as it focuses on its primary goal and priority to serve; the client, the fabricator, the industry as a whole and the community beyond. I saw gracious, caring human beings that make up the substance of Griffform in every sense. These are individuals who have emerged from a black hole...when others are still trying indeed. Impossible to escape a black hole, you say? Not for Griffform Innovations. Remember, no one has ever told Dwight about what cannot be done, or what impossible means. And let's hope that if anyone ever tries, Dwight will be so into whatever "moment he happens to be in at the time" that he just doesn't hear them. [Issfa](#)



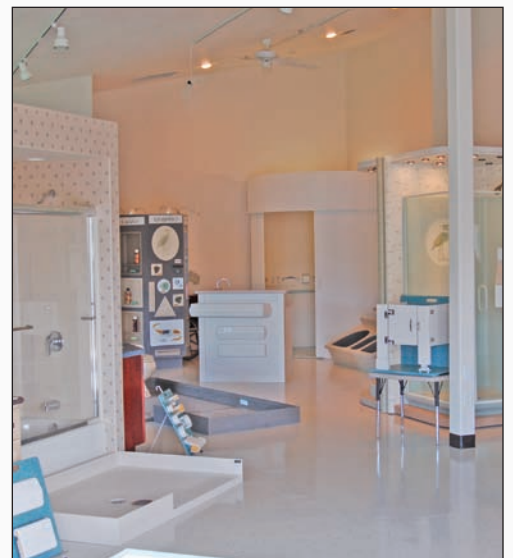
Currently Editor-in-Chief of the ISSFA magazine, Marie Diane Gerace has been a professional writer for twenty years. She has worked with some of the most successful and influential businessmen of the Las Vegas area at the executive level as corporate administrator, as well as director of human resources, quality assurance manager, and legal department manager. Marie is a published author with two novels, over two hundred short stories, numerous editorials and historical articles and essays to her credit. She remains an avid naturalist and volunteers her free time to the School of Life Sciences, UNLV, Nevada, with the biology department.



Griffform Innovations Trench Drain Shower Floor is designed to direct the water flow to prevent standing water of possibility of slipping, and integrates with the bath floor system already in place making cleaning easy.



The efficient manufacturing, handling, and shipping procedures routinely employed ensure a better product for Griffform's customers that is delivered on time, on budget, and meeting the high expectations of Griffform's wide ranging customer base.



Griffform Innovations showroom is the culmination of twenty-five years of working with solid surface. "Distinctive Excellence" was visible everywhere I looked, and came to heights as yet unimagined with the unequalled ER-1 Bath Pod.