

# SIMA® Snow Business®

November/December 2013

The official publication of the Snow & Ice Management Association | [www.GoPlow.com](http://www.GoPlow.com)



## Old School in a New Age

Ingram Enterprises adapts  
to a changing industry but holds  
true to ethos of ethics, safety  
and, above all, family

PAGE 12

ALL-STARS OF  
SNOW & ICE

COVERAGE  
BEGINS ON  
PAGE 37





# Old School in a New Age

Ingram Enterprises adapts to changing industry but holds true to ethos of ethics, safety and, above all, family

BY CHERYL HIGLEY // Editorial Director

**R**ick Ingram has seen the snow & ice management industry evolve (not always for the better) since he began plowing snow for a living 40 years ago. But one thing that hasn't changed is Ingram Enterprises' focus on trumping the low-cost/poor-service provider with honest and ethical practices, service and long-term relationships.

In 2007, Rick's heir apparent and daughter, Laura, joined the company. She brings a different mindset to the business, but she shares her father's vision, drive and pride for what he has spent so many years building.

They share their thoughts on a number of topics, including price vs. loyalty, their team members, and what makes the father-daughter dynamic work.

## Loyalty is coming back

Ingram Enterprises held a contract for a Fortune 100 company for 31 years. Then the firm hired a management company to oversee its properties, and every existing vendor was fired.

"The industry has gone from having individuals you can work with and build relationships with to decisions being made on a corporate or national level. The service has suffered tremendously, and the people who are feeling the brunt of it are the people walking into the convenience store or their office," Rick says. "I'm not naïve enough to think that price doesn't enter the equation, but it shouldn't be the only deciding factor."

At Ingram Enterprises, the safety of the people

walking in the door or across the parking lot is put ahead of everything else.

"My service level is the benchmark in the market. That hasn't changed even though the industry has," Rick says.

The good news, Laura says, is that the pendulum seems to be swinging back toward service over price.

"People are starting to realize that some [companies] were making empty promises to make a buck. It's turning back to the importance of having good service with someone they can trust behind it. They're tired of getting burned," she states.

## Maintaining control

Faced with the realities of the pricing models in the market, Ingram Enterprises has had to find ways to adapt and become more cost effective. One cost-cutting tactic the company won't rely on is subcontracting. With rare exception, Ingram Enterprises self-performs its snow & ice management. Doing so allows the company to keep tighter control on services, which are provided by many people who have been with the company for 20 years or more, including office manager Andrea Guastadisegni—who started working at Ingram's service station as a teen 30 years ago.

"You have to have employees operating the right equipment with knowledge and pride. My employees and my trucks are an extension of me, so it's important that you have the right people and that

*Continued on page 16*



PHOTO BY VITO PALMISANO





### DYNAMIC DUO

Ingram Enterprises founder Rick Ingram is grooming his daughter Laura to take over the business. His operational expertise, combined with her focus on sales, systems and networking, makes them a formidable duo in their tough Chicago market.

- ➔ **EQUIPMENT TAKES CENTER STAGE** // Page 14
- ➔ **MORE THAN DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL** // Page 16
- ➔ **TIPS FOR TRUCK SPECS** // [GoPlow.com](http://GoPlow.com)
- ➔ **EXCLUSIVE VIDEO INTERVIEW** // [GoPlow.com](http://GoPlow.com)



## OLD SCHOOL



PHOTO BY VITO PALMISANO

### MECHANICAL GURU

A self-professed “gearhead,” Rick Ingram loves his trucks. He and his daughter Laura have competed in shows with trucks you would never think have been leading the charge through a Chicago winter. They may be pretty, but there is more to them than meets the eye: “I have branded myself with my trucks. My name is prevalent, and they’re a different color for a reason. People know who I am and they know my trucks. My trucks are my passion. I love equipment ... I guess I didn’t have enough toys as a kid!”



### CATCH PHRASE

When the call goes out, Rick Ingram’s team knows it’s “Time to Feed the Chickens.”

### STORM CHECKS

Ingram Enterprises invests heavily in its trucks, which includes meticulous pre- and post-storm checks and maintenance. Each year, every inch of the trucks are gone over and “made new again.”

### SNOW DANCER

Rick’s Snow Dancer truck honors his wife, Jeanie, to whom he has been married 40 years. He attributes much of his success to her: “She couldn’t have been more supportive of my whole career. She didn’t always understand it, but she was always behind me.” Their daughter Laura agrees: Her support of him throughout the years has been monumental and seemingly unending. When everyone else, including our own family, can’t understand why our lives revolve around the weather, she has stood up for him and stood by him.”



PHOTOS BY LISA LEHMAN



# Ingram Enterprises' equipment makes an impression

In the greater Chicago market, Ingram Enterprises' trucks are unmistakable—painted a brilliant blue and several featuring murals, the name prominently featured, and immaculate inside and out.

Owner Rick Ingram, a self-professed “gearhead” is a longtime master mechanic and has spent years perfecting and custom crafting his snow & ice management equipment.

He has some smaller equipment to supplement, but he mostly relies on custom Peterbilt trucks, large airport-style snowblowers and heavy iron with pushers to get the job done.

“My equipment was specifically chosen for its size. With such a small window of opportunity, I need to maximize efficiencies and this equipment allows us

to stay on the job longer,” Rick explains.

He has spent years perfecting his truck specs. It took a lot of trial and error, but the key was doing the research and being willing to think outside the box.

“My first Peterbilt was an experiment. I didn't know how long it would take to cycle out. I was thinking maybe five to six years. Our first one is now 14 years old and

*Continued on page 19*



PHOTOS BY VITO PALMISANO

## ↑ MEMORABLE

Gleaming paint and plenty of lighting ensure Ingram's equipment stands out in the night.



## ↑ CUSTOM PAINT

Ingram hires a Chicago artist to paint the murals on the trucks.



You can't afford downtime. That's why we design our equipment with the fewest moving parts in the industry. No engines. No pulleys. No belts. No chains. Simply put...No headaches. Just more time on the road, and making money.

And you can't afford high interest payments. So we're also offering 0% interest for 2 years on everything.



Go to [snowexproducts.com/uptime](http://snowexproducts.com/uptime) to find your local dealer or call us at 1-800-725-8377.

**SNOWEX**  
LEADERS IN ICE CONTROL

## Laura Ingram shows she's more than Daddy's girl

In the mid-2000s, Rick Ingram started receiving offers to buy his company. While he admits he listened, he had put more than a quarter century of his heart and soul into building Ingram Enterprises and wasn't sure he could part with it. Ingram says he approached his two daughters to see whether there was any interest in taking over the business. If not, he would consider selling it.

His older daughter, Laura, was a high school math teacher. She knew it meant too much to let Ingram Enterprises go, so she decided to trade the classroom for a salt truck.

"Our family has revolved around snow and it's all I've ever known. If he let it go and sold it, I would have regretted not trying. There is a lot of pride that goes with continuing on the business," Laura says.

With the decision made, Rick says: "I told her I would do everything I could to make sure she succeeded. I turned down the offers and we went from there."

### From the bottom up

Laura wasn't new to the business. Besides growing up around the company, she spent summers in high school cleaning the trucks and helped Rick assemble three of the company's custom Peterbilt trucks while she was in college.

"My trucks are gone through every year and put back to new ... it's not washing daddy's car in the driveway. It's a tough, undesirable job," he says. "Those jobs helped her learn about how they work. It's not that she needs to be a mechanic, but she has to have knowledge of it. To be a hands-on owner or manager you have to have a feel for every part of the business so you can be a better leader."

He might have taught her how to assemble, wash and



Laura Ingram can hold her own in a salt truck, thanks to tough love from her dad, Rick, and training from his trusted employees.

even drive the trucks (Laura has her CDL), but Rick drew the line at teaching her the art of salting, even though he has taught countless others.

"I didn't want to teach her myself, because I probably wouldn't have had the patience and thought it best to stay out of it. Instead, I gave her some pointers and had an employee who is gifted in the process do it," he says.

### Earned, not given

Learning the ropes not only helped Laura learn the business, but she also earned the respect of the team.

"I didn't coddle her. She learned the hard way, but she learned the right way. I wasn't going to put up with any nonsense and was probably harder on her than anyone else," Rick says. "It was one of the hardest things I've done, but she gained the respect of her peers. If you don't have that, they won't work for you."

Laura says it was hard, but she had the choice—sink or swim. She chose to swim: "I didn't want to be the boss' kid, with anyone thinking I had something I didn't deserve. It's the best thing that could have ever happened. To be able to continue this another generation is pretty special."

PHOTO BY VITO PALMISANO

*Continued from page 12*

everyone's on the right side of the fence," he says.

### Terrific in tandem

Since agreeing to take over the business when Rick retires, Laura has learned from the ground up and has brought a new perspective and skill set to the company. Rick is more operationally focused, whereas she has been building relationships and a peer network within

SIMA and similar associations, as well as implementing new processes.

"She looks at things differently, more open-minded. I don't know if that is age, character or both, but she thinks of things I never would have," Rick says. "She has opened a lot of doors for us in the last few years. She'll be running very fast, very soon, and that's a positive."

### Looking to the future

Nothing lasts forever, and Rick—who

turned 60 in November—knows the time will come for Laura to step front and center, but he has a good backup plan:

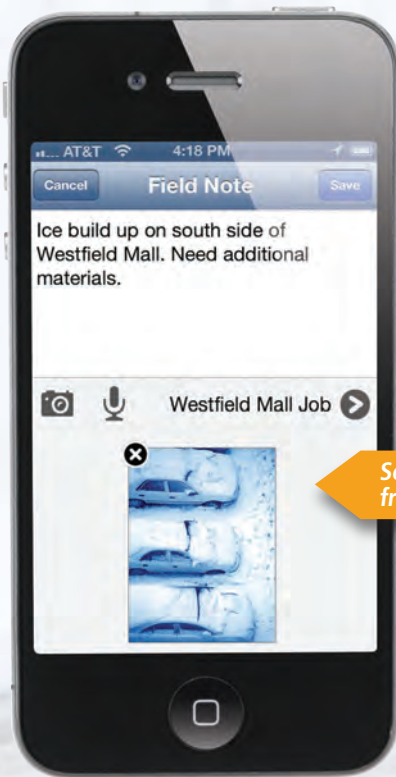
"In business and in life, everything comes and goes. When it's not fun anymore I'm out of here. But I'll always be her father, and that takes precedence over everything." ❄

*Cheryl Higley is editorial director of Snow Business magazine. Contact her at [chigley@mooservermedia.com](mailto:chigley@mooservermedia.com).*



# EXAKTIME MOBILE

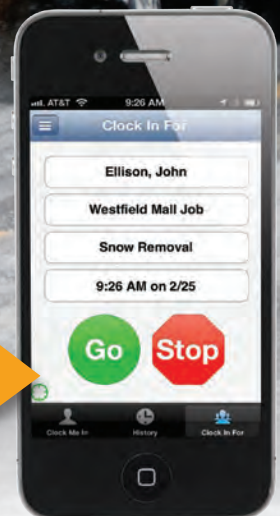
## ADVANCED TIME-TRACKING TOOLS ON YOUR SMARTPHONE



Send field notes right  
from your Smartphone.



Receive GPS time stamp  
on clock in.



### The Snow Industry's Time Tracker App.

Track all your labor on your Smartphone in *real-time*, with GPS precision, advanced management tools and photo biometrics. It's the hassle-free way to get accurate time records at your job sites.

- Stop overtime before it becomes an issue
- Eliminate buddy punching with biometrics
- Guarantee records are safe and accurate
- Know the exact locations of your mobile crews
- Receive time records wirelessly in the office
- Protect your business from compliance risks

MEMBER  
**SIMA**  
snow & ice management association



1.877.855.4316 | [www.exaktime.com/sb](http://www.exaktime.com/sb)



The Advanced Snow Management Program

# Train your team to win with SIMA

Specialty training certificate courses, delivered online.  
Succeed in all four to get the Advanced Snow Manager designation.



Which path is best for you? ASM and CSP work together.

#### **Advanced Snow Management (ASM) program**

A focused core-knowledge certificate training program designed for equipment operators and snow event operations managers. There are no continuing education requirements to maintain the designation.

#### **Certified Snow Professional (CSP) program**

A certification for owners and executives, focused on the critical elements of running a professional snow business. There are pre-requisites, and annual continuing education requirements to maintain a CSP certification.

**Act Now!**

Visit [www.sima.org/resources](http://www.sima.org/resources) to get started



## OLD SCHOOL



PHOTO BY LISA LEHMAN

### ⬆️ BIG STUFF

Bigger equipment, including Ingram's renowned Peterbilt trucks and airport snowblowers, allow for greater efficiencies.

*Continued from page 15*

is nowhere near needing to be replaced," Rick says.

The longer cycle time is due, in part, to the extraordinary lengths Ingram goes to protect the equipment.

**Housing.** All of the trucks are housed inside to help limit corrosion, especially on the aluminum transmissions, and protect them from the elements.

**Maintenance.** "Your trucks are only new once," Rick says, which is why he's vigilant about their care and maintenance. Preventive maintenance is done at every opportunity, and each season the trucks are restored to like-new condition.

**Washing.** Ingram says the biggest key is washing the trucks. He even developed his own car wash with PVC piping and nozzles. "You don't want to use a pressure washer. You want medium pressure and high volume so you're not blasting salt into places that could corrode. It costs a lot of money over the course of winter, but it makes a huge difference as far as longevity," he says. "When you can't tell a difference between the looks and reliability of your oldest truck and your newest, you are doing something right." ❄️

» Rick Ingram gives tips on what he requires when he specs equipment at GoPlow.com.

"WHEN YOU SIGN UP FOR SNOW REMOVAL, you are hiring a human being and the decisions they are going to make. Are they making those decisions based on their pocketbook or on the safety of the clients and tenants walking in the building? You can't answer that on an RFP. That's trust that has to be built."

— RICK INGRAM, PRESIDENT, INGRAM ENTERPRISES



# INTERNATIONAL SALT®

an SPL company



## Providing a Comprehensive Selection of High-Quality Bulk and Packaged Ice-Melt Products



888-388-4726 • [internationalsalt.com](http://internationalsalt.com)