

# Get to know the 2024 NEWH ICON of Industry

**W**hat year did nominee become involved in the hospitality industry:

Diana Dobin officially joined the Valley Forge Fabrics team in late 1993 but had been a part of the industry ever since her childhood. Her parents, Dan and Judy, founded the company when she was five years old. Growing up, she spent her weekends, holidays, and summer vacations working for the business, which grew her love for design, textiles, innovation, and manufacturing, as well as the incredible people of VFF and the Hospitality Industry. She attended the famed NEWH/ Los Angeles Gala multiple times when she was in high school in the late 1980s. Today, she serves as co-CEO along with her brother, Mikey. She also has the role of Chief Sustainability Officer for Valley Forge.

**H**ow has nominee impacted the hospitality industry?

As an individual, Diana has been an incredible force in the hospitality industry as a dedicated NEWH member and leader, a mentor to many, a trusted advisor and supporter – and an innovator pioneering the way for sustainability, long before it was part of the industry's conversation. Diana has also been a vocal advocate for others and a champion of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

Diana got involved with NEWH first as an intern in NY in the 1980s when her mother, Judy Dobin, was an active board member. She immediately understood the value of mentorship and support that NEWH was able to provide its members – and it was a very natural fit for Diana's compassion for others for her to give her own time to serve the industry through NEWH. Over the

past 30 years, Diana has served on the local level as a board member of the New York Chapter and a board member of the South Florida Chapter. Diana also served as the Director of Expansion, and on the expansion committee for several years. She was integrally involved when NEWH chartered its first international chapters in London and Canada, and the then National Board became the International Board. The expansion of NEWH internationally was a huge milestone for the organization, and Diana's efforts as well as those of others helped bring this about. The UK chapter was founded in 2002 and the Toronto, Canada in 2004. She was also a part of the leadership that expanded NEWH domestically with the addition of the San Francisco Chapter in 2010 as well as some of the NEWH Regional Groups in 2011.

Diana recognized early on in her career that synonymous with her personal definition of a successful business, was a recognition of environmental sustainability and its intersection with human health. This she realized would have to be a major consideration in both short-term and long-term Valley Forge goals. Diana has always believed that the hospitality industry has both an opportunity and responsibility to both people and the environment – and she structured her own career around the simple premise of impacting the health and happiness of others. As Valley Forge grew, she understood the importance of people and their immeasurable value at the heart of the company, and therefore Diana felt she must take on the additional role and title of Chief Sustainability Officer, ensuring that human well-being and preservation of the environment would be a part of every single VFF business decision.

Valley Forge is regarded as a sustainability steward and has been consistently dedicated and first-to- market with environmental products and processes under Diana's vision and leadership.

Upholsteries made from recycled plastic water bottles came first. Linens made from Tencel+Plus Lyocell made from eucalyptus and other botanicals, followed by upcycled fabrics made from plastic that has been reclaimed from the ocean were all introduced by Valley Forge and are products that are now known across the industry. Today Diana is focused on decreased CoHC (chemicals of high concern) in textile products and as always, views the intersection of environmental sustainability and human health as the priority. Diana takes the time to educate others about sustainability and the intersection of products and human health regularly. She volunteers her personal time to speak on this topic at conferences, companies, and Universities – sharing Valley Forge's unique focus on human health and the connection to sustainable products and processes.

Recognizing that the future of our industry and our world was dependent on the leaders of the future, Diana also served for 7 years on the Board of The Cornell University School of Hotel Administration Pillsbury Institute for Entrepreneurship. More than just participating on a board whose programs focused on start-ups, innovations, and the businesses of hospitality, she also always made time for the personal mentorship of students. Some of those relationships lasted well past the students' graduation and continued as they pursued their careers. Diana also volunteered her time and skills to speak in a class, hold "office hours" on



**DIANA DOBIN**  
Co-CEO  
Valley Forge Fabrics



campus, and focus on both hiring and guiding students as they searched for their passions and even built their own businesses. Valley Forge, historically, has been “like a United Nations” since its founding in 1977. Diana maintains that the more diverse an organization is, the better it is and the more impactful it can be for its clients and partners. She values different perspectives and believes that when people from different backgrounds come together it creates a magical formula for solving problems and creating excellence in a way that homogeneity cannot. She has focused on expanding the company’s already natural diversity as a supportive model for the industry and is known for her passionate pursuit of equality. She is personally focused and concerned with the Equity gap, and through her own actions, seeks to tighten up that divide. Diana is a recognized supporter of HDAC (Hospitality Diversity Action Council) in our industry; and through her commitment, Valley Forge is a Strategic Partner to the organization.

**G**ive examples of acts of nominees personal and/or corporate giving:

Diana is a true philanthropist, passionate about causes pertaining to the environment, women, and minorities, and because she believes in the transformational power of community and education, she often engages with causes, programs, groups, and opportunities that provide those opportunities to the people who need it most. She has a consistent history of demonstrating both financial support, personal and corporate, and more importantly her personal time, dedicated to causes that make a difference to people as individuals.

For many years, Diana volunteered money and her time, at the State level, serving on the Board of Sustainable Florida, a unique alliance of business, government, higher education and citizen leaders committed to conserving Florida’s vast natural and economic resources. As Diana led the sustainability efforts of Valley Forge, she learned that Florida has a unique position pertaining to the critical water supply of the state. Florida has more large-magnitude artesian springs (springs that discharge more than 65 million gallons per day) than any other state. The water that discharges from these springs comes from aquifers that contain billions of gallons of fresh water. Diana shared her time and expertise collaborating with people from Disney, Darden, and Publix, among other respected large organizations – to preserve the critical resources provided by Florida and depended on by millions of people.

Through Valley Forge, Diana led company support of The Loveland Foundation – an organization aimed at providing opportunity, access, and resources for communities of color, particularly girls and women. Diana implemented a Valley Forge company match for employee contributions to the foundation.

Diana has also been involved personally, as well as through Valley Forge, with several incredible local South Florida philanthropic organizations. HANDY, JAFCO and The Broward College Foundation are but a few of these.

HANDY aims at uplifting youth, providing life skills, education, and support. VFF supports the organization through gifts in kind as well as by organizing and hosting events like the HANDY fashion show which both raises money for the organization and amplifies aspiring artists. The most recent collaboration, the fashion show, empowered students of HANDY to celebrate their creativity by making garments from Valley Forge Fabrics that were showcased at a community event held at the VFF headquarters. Valley Forge hires HANDY students as interns and has also successfully transitioned interns to full-time employees. The company also provides coaching by executives to the HANDY members and provides scholarships for HANDY members that choose to enter the hospitality industry and training programs through FAU (Florida Atlantic University).

JAFCO provides a full continuum of high-quality services including foster care, adoption, family preservation, mentoring, independent living and developmental disability programs. The JAFCO Children’s Village, consisting of an Emergency Shelter and six Group Homes, is one of the most unique and innovative programs in the nation. The JAFCO Children’s Ability Center supports families raising children with developmental disabilities by providing family enrichment, resources, and respite care all within one state-of-the-art center. JAFCO also provides foster care, adoption, family preservation and support services to families raising a child with a developmental disability in their Philadelphia location. Valley Forge has supported JAFCO for over 20 years financially and through gifts in kind. Equally importantly, Diana & her husband Steve are “JAFCO Godparents”, donating a committed amount of money each year, since 2007, to directly support JAFCO children.

Diana is committed to fostering mentoring and growth for local colleges and universities, particularly in at the main office location. Broward College has been a key area of focus of her philanthropic efforts. Through her efforts, Valley Forge has established and grown our partnership with this key institution of higher-level learning based in South Florida. The VFF Chief Operating Officer has served as a member of the Board of Broward College Foundation. Through Diana’s efforts, Valley Forge Fabrics has coordinated product donations for BC students and families in excess of \$100K over recent years while continuing efforts for partnering.

Diana’s initial vision of Give Back Day at Valley Forge Fabrics was to extend her family’s legacy of community volunteering and support to the entire company employee base. This vision has come full circle through an annual all-employee event whereby operations cease and employees are paid to physically work with a local organization in the community to provide volunteering in areas closely associated with the company’s values. On Give Back Day, Valley Forge employees have worked with food banks and other organizations supporting underserved members of our communities including those without shelter, without family support and others. These efforts not only provide real-time support for these worthy organizations, but in addition provide financial support from funds raised by employees, funds matched by VFF and funds donated thoughtfully by company partners, customers and friends. Some of the company’s main efforts on Give Back Day have been directed to Feeding South Florida, Poverello, Broward Partnership, Father Bill’s & Mainspring, and others throughout the years.

Diana has served as a pro-bono Judge for the Academy of Interactive & Visual Arts annual awards for the past 5 years, providing feedback and selecting winners for the prestigious Communicator, Davey, and w3 awards programs.

Over the years at Valley Forge, Diana has served in the capacity of a mentor both officially and unofficially. Recognizing the value of being able to coach people to their greater potential when individuals feel supported, understood and respected, Valley Forge set up mentor/mentee relationships from time to time to assist less experienced team members in gaining confidence and learning from the experience of accomplished VFF leaders. As part of the structured program, Diana made time to mentor younger women entering the business. Unofficially, Diana is a consistent servant leader who thrives on helping boost others to higher levels.

Diana and her husband Steve have been married for over 25 years and Diana is grateful for Steve's impact and encouragement of her passions, by advising her early in their relationship, that she should both work hard and grow her career in Hospitality, and then use her successes along the way to raise up as many others around her as possible. Steve's love and support has both encouraged and enabled Diana to take risks and pour her time and passion into their family, into the extended Valley Forge family, and into the extended family of Hospitality.

Personally, Diana and her husband have been vocal supporters of women's rights, minority rights, diversity, equity, inclusion, environmental sustainability and human health - and have personally focused on giving support as well as their personal time to actively create a better world.

As consistent supporters of the Arts, Diana and her husband Steve have been personal advocates for emerging artists as well as programs at major museums that connect art to the local community. In NYC, both MoMA and the Whitney have benefited from their support for over 20 years, and in Miami, they have been supporters since 2013 of the Perez Art Museum Miami.

In 2021, Diana and Steve moved to CT and immediately became Founding Friends of Grace Farms CT, a humanitarian and cultural center serving local and global communities. Nature, arts, justice, community, and faith initiatives intersect and inform one another at Grace Farms, which increases diverse perspectives and inclusive collaboration. Grace Farms is committed to addressing humanitarian issues as a holistic community: including modern slavery, environmental sustainability, food insecurity, and disconnected communities. This unique approach often leads to unprecedented new outcomes.

Also, upon their move to CT, Diana and Steve became 1 of only 35 Grainger Society level supporters of The Glass House. The Glass House, or Johnson House, is a historic house in New Canaan, Connecticut, built in 1948–49 and celebrated as one of the premier examples of Mid Century Modern Architecture. Called his "signature work", designed by architect Philip Johnson as his own residence, the house was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1997.

In 2022, Diana, her husband Steve and their children: son Jake & his wife Maia, son Caleb and daughter Rosie became a Host Family, through A Better Chance Westport, and have expanded their family and their love to include high school student Vincent. A Better Chance Westport provides educational opportunities to academically gifted and highly motivated young men of color. Through Host Families, the scholars are given a "home away from home", an opportunity to experience the community by participating in normal everyday family activities. Vinny and his curls meld perfectly with Diana and family. They love traveling, cooking, sports, the outdoors, music and live entertainment.

Diana's ability to authentically connect with others provides a supportive and safe space naturally and authentically for people to explore new ideas, seek guidance and feel her love and her warmth. Diana inspires others through her creativity, her attention to the smallest details that make a difference and her unparalleled love for all people. Her favorite word is HARMONY and Diana has sought this for herself and others throughout her life and her career. Diana has used every opportunity she has had to fight for equality and goodness while she has been a part of leading and building Valley Forge into the respected Hospitality-focused organization it is today. Every chance Diana has gotten, she has used love to guide, assist, support, mentor and create well-being and prosperity for her family, her local communities, Valley Forge and the extended Hospitality community.

## **C**ommunity Recognition & Awards

1. 2008: Emerald Award Environmental Business of the Year
2. 2008: Large Business Emerald Award for Green Products and Practices
3. 2008: IHM&RS Editor's Choice Award Best New Product Green Luxury
4. 2008: Sustainable Florida 10th Annual Best Practice Awards Sustainable Large Business
5. 2009: 40 Under Forty (Diana & Michael Dobin)
6. 2009: Sustainable South Florida Awards
7. 2009: Outstanding Institutional Business
8. 2009: Emerald Award
9. 2009: Emerald Award Green Products/Practices Large Business
10. 2010: IHMRS Best New Product Lines
11. 2011: Earth Minded Award Hospitality Product
12. 2012: Mind Click Supplier Sustainability Award
13. 2012: International Sustainability Leadership Award
14. 2013: Evergreen Award
15. 2013: ISHP Vendor Quality Award
16. 2018: Climate Action Leader the People Strategy Award
17. 2018: Most Outstanding Green Interior Design – Large
18. 2020: The Common Threat for the Cure - Threat of Honor
19. 2020: Landscape Architect Award
20. 2022: Transformational Women in Family Business - Diana Dobin