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Industry pioneer Kleen Strike (UK) celebrates 25th anniversary

This month Kleen Strike (UK) celebrates 25 years of remanufacturing. Managing Director Laura Heywood remembers the early years and what it was that made Kleen Strike so unique and Laura so passionate about an industry she has been a part of for so long.

Born in Austin, Texas Laura moved to the UK in 1978 from San Francisco after meeting Dennis Heywood, a company owner from Oldham who made woollen wall coverings and was at the time setting up an outlet in California. When he returned to Lancashire she decided, along with her young son to go with him and emigrate. "I remember asking him what the weather was like in Manchester" and he said "Oh, similar to Maryland" (where she'd lived for many years). When the temperature hardly got above 60 that first summer she looked at the globe and followed it around and found Maryland was

spool can last for years! You really needed hundreds of accounts and it was very much

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door to door selling back in the 50's and 60's" states Laura, who has been Managing Director of Kleen Strike since her partner Don Barker's semi-retirement on medical

eventually Washington DC. "I guess it was flying where I learned my gift of the gab and meeting so many people from different walks of life - from politicians (Bobby Kennedy), dozens of entertainers, sports and film stars (either totally demanding or the nicest people you'd ever want to meet) to the most ordinary people with the most extra ordinary stories to tell (holocaust survivors, 5 star Generals, ordinary soldiers and working people). On those long haul

flights you learn a lot - there's something about being confined in a long tube with lots of time on your hands that makes people want to talk about the most personal events in their lives. There were no iPods or laptops or game boys when I flew so passengers were much more sociable."

Decision time

"After five years living in Rochdale and following my divorce, I knew I had to get involved in something or return to the States." Along with her partner Don, who combined his knowledge in engineering with Kleen-Strike's backing, they set up Kleen Strike (UK). With Laura's experience in ribbons and a bit of social skills, they had the confidence that they could offer a new concept that companies would embrace. "My dad sent us a used Branson welder, 2 Kuhn ribbon inkers, a stuffing table and the training and expertise of his twenty years in the industry".

"To learn what ribbons were popular in the UK we offered a ribbon cassette reloading service as well as a few select new compatible ribbon cassettes. Re-inking had already been tried in the UK with mostly disastrous results but replacing with



the same longitude as southern Spain, and Manchester was in line with Moscow and Nova Scotia. And she still stayed!

Laura's dad began Kleen-Strike Inc in Columbia, Maryland in 1963 after working for a large office supplier for about eight years that supplied spool to spool typewriter ribbons, carbon paper and various office sundries. "If you think a 20K toner can last a while - a typewriter ribbon

grounds.

When the new technology of ribbon cassettes surfaced, during school breaks I would earn a little by stuffing cassettes so became familiar with this industry at an early age. I finished High School, studied two years at university and while there, on a whim applied to United Airlines, was hired, and worked as a stewardess based out of, at different times, Chicago, New York City and

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new ribbon; a cassette would work as well as a new one, usually last longer and at 30-40% less in price than a new one, our business grew.

"It was the early 80's and the UK was entering a recession so people were looking for ways to save money. We acquired some very large accounts fairly quickly - House of Fraser, Littlewoods Org, Honeywell, Victoria Wine etc. We also came against some very large angry original ribbon cassette manufacturers. One Point of Sale manufacturer of ribbon cassettes had their legal department telephone and threaten us. I told him we weren't going to stop reloading their ribbons (you couldn't play the environment card back then - no one cared) and he said 'even if you're in the right, we will make it very expensive for you and tie you up legally in the courts for years - we will bury you'. Just at that time the compatible came out so we replaced the originals to the new compatible and reloaded those."

Always adapting

"When the offices became quieter and quieter we knew we had to get involved in this new laser technology. The HP II (SX) cartridge was at that time probably 80% or more of the market and the HP IIP was just

coming out. And at the time we thought we may be too late."

About this same time, Kleen-Strike Inc. was finishing and selling their equipment to their main customer who was already involved in toner remanufacturing but wanted to continue with ribbons as well. "Part of the deal was Don and I learning the toner cartridge remanufacturing process - I held the camera."

"On returning from Florida we hired a British aerospace engineer recently made redundant. With his and Don's engineering background and skills, we would dissect each new popular toner as it came on the market, buy the printer and add it to the growing list of products we offered."

"As more and more toners came on the market, the little bubble jet printers started to surface. After doing research in refilling technology we added those to our products as well as original toners and inkjets. When single-sourcing became prevalent we knew we had to change again and added stationery and office products to our line of what we offered. And two years ago we added second user printers, printer



servicing and printer repair to what we offered and most recently print management service contracts."

In the early years, there were toners such as the early Panasonics that began incorporating fuses that blew when ▶

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installed, recognising that a new cartridge was present. These were readily available and were easily replaced. The toner low indication usually worked with a light beam to tell them when empty rather than a counter. Then came the little Tallys with the resetting modules where you had to purchase a chip resetter for new cartridge recognition. Then these little 'cartridge to printer contact devices' began to get more and more sinister and alarming.

Finding a voice

"In the late 1990s we sent in a submission to The Recycler Magazine and were thrilled that what we had to say was of interest to the rest of the industry. And then further submissions followed though the years. But it was joining UKCRA (UK Cartridge Remanufacturing Association) that gave us the confidence to voice our concerns on a different level. Through the concerted efforts of many we would not only have a voice within our industry, but could publicly and politically challenge these changes that

were becoming more threatening every year.

"Kleen Strike has enjoyed success and recognition in the past. When the BERTL, an independent test lab invited remanufacturers to send in a



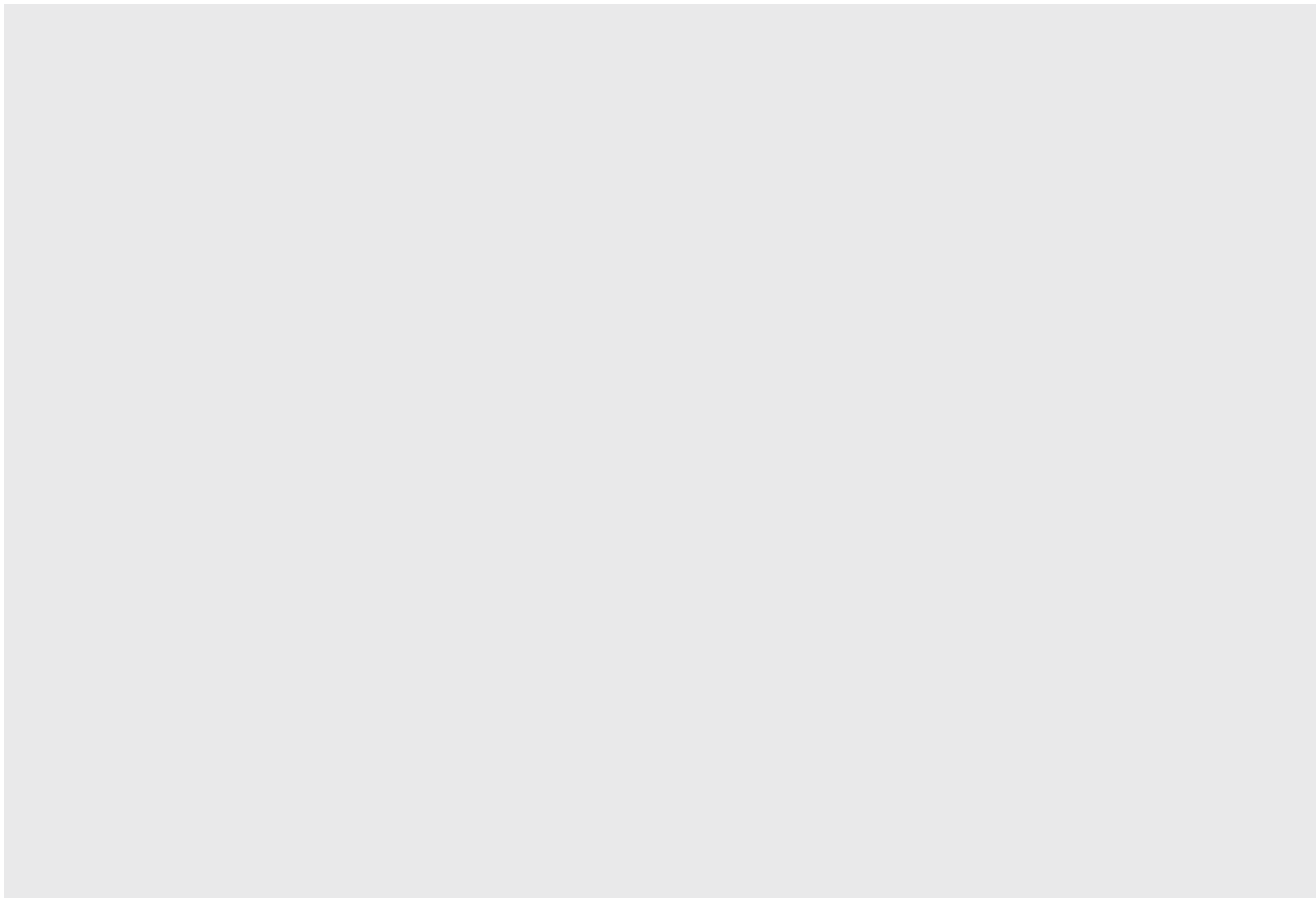
remanufactured HP4 toner for a comparative study they were doing with the HP4 original as the standard, we were happy to be included in the study knowing we had the confidence to be measured against the best. The results were "Kleen Strike's pristine quality", and on grey scale "the best of these tests". In fact we were

told by the lab following the report that HP sent an engineer in to see our cartridge to confirm whether it was indeed replaced components or just an HP original that had been re-badged.

Reaching recognition

In 2002, we were awarded Remanufacturer of the Year by The Recycler Magazine. "This was a complete surprise and we were just so overwhelmed by The Recycler's acknowledgement and recognition of Kleen Strike's efforts within the industry".

In 2002, Laura was runner-up for the 'North Manchester Women in Business' award that included a £1,000 cheque. This was due to her efforts in her campaign to change EU electrical waste legislation. Through her spearheading efforts and with UKCRA taking up the challenge, lobbying began in earnest against so-called 'clever chips', and other anti-reuse devices. When she approached Chris Davies MEP about the use of 'killer chips' and other anti-reuse modifications to cartridges, he actively campaigned and secured a change in the European law that prevents printer manufacturers from fitting anti-reuse devices to their electrical products. Davies stated "there is no doubt that without Laura's vigour and determination no ▶



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such addition to the law would have been made”.

And just last year Laura was nominated by the readers of Recharger Magazine in the category of Industry Leader for the prestigious Reader’s Choice award. “To know I’ve been recognised for my efforts by the American remanufacturing industry as well was quite a thrill, not only because of my American ties but also because it was the universal approval of my peers that meant so much to me.”

“Then these little ‘cartridge to printer contact devices’ began to get more and more sinister and alarming”

Kleen Strike was one of the founding members of ETIRA (European Toner and Inkjet Remanufacturing Association) and Laura has been Secretary of UKCRA for the past 11 years. She has represented UKCRA with decision makers at government level where UKCRA continues to strive to protect the reuse industry by actively campaigning to allow printer users their fundamental freedom of choice on what products they wish to use.

It has been a roller coaster ride for Kleen Strike since it began all those years ago. “We’ve had some great years and some very difficult years along the way” says Laura, both with the company and personally with Laura having life threatening by-pass heart surgery and her partner Don battling cancer for many years and now in remission.



Looking ahead

The future looks more promising than ever before and with the rising costs daily of OEM supplies, people will be looking more than ever for alternative quality supplies.

Has Laura started to rest on her laurels now? Absolutely not! “There’s another threat on the horizon and I’ve already made the initial paths into addressing it with my local MP to seek a meeting with DEFRA.” What is becoming a big concern to the UK industry is the influx of millions of non OEM foreign remanufactured/refilled toners and inkjets from Eastern Europe and China with no take back schemes in place by the distributors or suppliers for their recycling. Because of this, these orphans are ending up in UK landfills by the millions every month. “We have to accept responsibility for our own products and we feel it shouldn’t be up to the cartridge collectors to be burdened with these non virgins that are flooding in to the UK daily.”

“Have we come ‘full circle’? The environment and the devastating effect that non-biodegradable printer cartridges have on it has always been one of the main concerns for us, even when we were refilling ribbon cassettes in the early 80’s.”

The Kleen Strike name goes back to the old days of impact, now it stands for a different kind of impact.

