

# KOHLER Magazine

A global discussion on design 3



# The Belief in Better

Laura Kohler is the great-granddaughter of John Michael Kohler, who founded Kohler Co. in 1873. As Senior Vice President — Human Resources, Stewardship and Sustainability, Laura represents the fourth generation of Kohler family leadership and oversees the company's global human resources and its global social impact team, which is responsible for Kohler's Stewardship, Environmental Sustainability, and Innovation for Good programs.

By Michele Koh Morollo  
Images courtesy of Kohler Co.



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Before taking on a full-time role at Kohler Company in 1995 as Director of Public Affairs, Laura worked as an actress and launched her own theater company in Chicago in 1991. “At the time, I felt like I wasn’t making a societal impact,” she says of her early acting days. But that changed when she became involved in social work at a homeless shelter. “I realized that all the people living at the shelter had amazing stories to tell. It occurred to me that if I could help them tell their stories, we could raise awareness of vagrancy in the city and help get people off the streets. That’s when I started Address Unknown, a theatre company that gave homeless people the opportunity to tell their stories. Instead of being on stage, I was behind the scenes directing and it really resonated with me; I learned that when you can help make a positive difference in the world, you should keep at it.”

As a guardian of Kohler Co.’s valuable talent, Laura continues to work for the well-being of others and the community at large; to her, stewardship is about activating and empowering people. “Being involved with Kohler Stewardship has shown me that no amount of money is as powerful as harnessing the passion of our people,” she explains.

Laura was greatly influenced in this by her father, Herbert V. Kohler Jr., who had always encouraged her and her siblings to be bold, take risks, and know their worth. “He instilled a strong work ethic in us and taught us to set goals and never give up on them. When we joined the organization, he taught us to listen and learn, to appreciate the associates and the hard work that had come before us before suggesting changes,” she says. Laura’s mother Linda Karger also shaped



C

her perspective: “She taught us to always care for and be considerate of those who didn’t have what we did, and often reminded us that ‘to whom much is given, from them much is expected.’”

Driven by her passion for bringing safe water and improved sanitation to developing communities around the world, Laura has created meaningful partnerships with social enterprises and humanitarian organizations to distribute more than 180,000 Clarity™ water filters in more than 20 countries. In 2018 alone, more than 19,000 people were positively impacted by Kohler’s Safe Water for All and Clarity™ programs.

Laura’s perspective on growth and leadership is inspiring, and to help remain balanced and focused, she enjoys a range of holistic activities. “Being outdoors keeps me close to the earth and nature-centered, while yoga is a spiritually grounding practice that helps me to be a more calm, centered executive. Travel is also critical to my personal growth and education; I’m a better executive when I immerse myself in different cultures,” she says. “It allows me to better understand cultural nuances, make more meaningful connections with our associates, and help Kohler Co. navigate different regions and cultures with more awareness and sensitivity.”



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- A As a fourth-generation member of the Kohler family, Laura Kohler feels a strong sense of responsibility in driving the company's sustainability and social impact initiatives. This includes the Safe Water for All program, which in 2019 will span Latin America, China, Southeast Asia, and India
- B The aftermath of Hurricane Irma severely limited access to potable water in Puerto Rico. Kohler Co. launched Operation Agua in conjunction with a network of NGOs with a target of providing 100,000 Clarity™ water filters, which are electricity-free and easy to assemble. The filters provide up to 40 liters of safe drinking water per day that is 99% bacteria- and protozoa-free
- C Laura is often the face of Kohler Co.'s social initiatives, such as 2018's Run for Clarity, in which 7,800 participants ran 1.5 times the circumference of the earth and helped 20,000 people through the distribution and support of Clarity™ water filters