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## Gina Schaefer

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Ace Retailer, 12-store chain

Gina Schaefer lives her life by one motto – “born an original, don’t die a copy.” Never one to be stumped by convention, she challenges the male-dominated hardware industry every day to think well outside the box.

Schaefer is founder and CEO of a chain of Ace Hardware stores located in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, MD and Alexandria, VA. She is a passionate entrepreneur who grew her company from one to 12 stores in only 14 years, and now leads a multimillion-dollar business that employs more than 250 people. As a former member of the Ace Hardware Corporation Board of Directors and current member of the Ace Center for Excellence, she is dedicated to maintaining a strong corporate culture.

Schaefer’s big passion is for developing urban markets, supporting small businesses and helping women to succeed in all aspects of the hardware industry. She has tirelessly focused on the “Return to Main Street” movement in her own city of Washington, D.C., to promote Shop Local campaigns and community revitalization in urban areas.

Schaefer draws her inspiration from fellow entrepreneurs who strive to be creative, think differently and help make a difference. People like Judy Wicks, founder of the White Dog Café in Philadelphia, from whom Schaefer learned innovative business strategies; Paul Saginaw and Ari Weinzweig, founders of gourmet food group Zingerman’s Community of Businesses in Michigan, who inspired her to use her voice as a force for good; and Father Gregory Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, who taught her that nonprofit organizations need to think beyond simple charity.

Schaefer has received numerous accolades for her many accomplishments, including: recipient of the Women Who Mean Business award from the Washington Business Journal of 2009, recognized as an industry Top Gun in 2011 by the National Retail Hardware Association, honored by Profiles in Diversity Journal as one of its Women Worth Watching in 2013, and recognized by Hardware and Building Supply Dealer as one of 14 of the 2016 “People of the Year.”

She also serves on the Corporate Board of CCA Global, the Corporate Advisory Council for Jubilee Jobs and the nonprofit boards of House of Ruth and the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

When her busy schedule allows, Schaefer likes to relax by making greeting cards (she’s a big believer in the power of the written note), kayaking, taking spin classes, travelling, reading and, of course, mentoring other small business owners.