

# APPLICATOR

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# STRIVING FOR FALL PROTECTION SAFETY

**A**pplicator Magazine recently interviewed Kelly Streeter, P.E., partner at three related companies: Vertical Access, Alta Access and TPAS about how she got her start in the industry.

**Applicator:** How did you get into the business?

**Kelly Streeter:** I was a senior in structural engineering at Cornell in 1996 and working as a rock climbing instructor when I met the founding partner of Vertical Access, Kent Diebolt. The timing of the meeting was auspicious: I was about to leave engineering altogether for a career in management consulting. After I met Kent and learned about his business, I decided to give engineering another try, concentrating on existing structures.

Kent introduced me to Robert Silman whom I then worked for four years before going to graduate school and then taking my PE exam. I ultimately rejoined Vertical Access in 2003.

**Applicator:** What was the first industry topic that you became passionate about? What's your passion now?

**Kelly Streeter:** The topic that I first became interested in was helping to introduce the old-school restoration architecture, engineering, and construction industry to technology. I

did this, in part, by helping to refine our software program, TPAS.

Originally developed for in-house use at Vertical Access, TPAS is now a stand-alone company facilitating and supporting license agreements and customization for other consultancies. Making the software available to other companies has allowed us to aggressively drive the feedback loop for its improvements. These relationships allow us to prioritize developments that may have never occurred to us in our niche experience.

Currently I have two main interests. The first is fall protection safety. Vertical Access has been on the ANSI Fall Protection Code committee since 2001. I have been responsible for that engagement for eight years. We originally got involved in the creation of the Fall Protection Code to encourage the inclusion of Industrial Rope Access in this

important family of standards. After the endless dedication of Louis McCurley, from PMI Rope, the standard section dedicated to rope access had recently received ballot approval for the ANSI 459 - a giant step for the recognition of Industrial Rope Access as a safe means of access in North America.

I am currently responsible for the safety requirements for Descent Controllers Subcommittee. Our involvement over the past 16

years has been a commitment for us; traveling to two three-day meetings in Chicago or Denver each year. We sit next to representatives from Boeing, the Air Force, the United Auto Workers; it is very humbling as a representative of a company that is miniscule compared to these other entities.

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“career day” type presentations at my kids’ schools. It has expanded to regularly volunteering to visit and present at our local schools, as well as guest lecturing in both undergraduate and graduate programs in engineering architecture and preservation. If I reach one person who may be considering leaving or changing their current path because they don’t understand the full breadth of potential careers in restoration, I will consider this commitment a success.

**Applicator:** Who was your industry mentor?

**Kelly Streeter:** This is an easy one: Kent Diebolt. If I had not met him when I did, the entire course of my professional life would have been altered.

**Applicator:** What changes have you seen in the industry through the years?

**Kelly Streeter:** A big change we have seen in the last five years is the consolidation of companies, especially for architecture and engineering consultancies. The “big guys” are consistently vacuuming up smaller companies, which can make continued collaboration with individuals more difficult.

**Applicator:** Is the SWR Institute a resource to you and your company?

**Kelly Streeter:** Absolutely. We have repeatedly used the Safety and Health Manual in particular on our projects. We use the conferences to connect with old friends and associates, as well as make new contacts.

**Applicator:** What challenges are you facing at your business. And on a broader scale, what challenges do you see the industry facing?

**Kelly Streeter:** The Scaffold

Law (NYS Labor Law sections 240/241) imposes “absolute liability” for elevation-related injuries on contractors and property owners engaged in construction, repair, or demolition work. Absolute liability means that the contributing fault of an injured worker, such as failure to use provided safety equipment or gross negligence, is virtually irrelevant in court. In effect, employers have no standing in court, should a scaffold law case be brought against them for any reason. This outdated law has a number of deleterious effects in our primary markets in New York State. The New York State Scaffold Law essentially guarantees that any lawsuit will be settled before a trial. In fact, the number of lawsuits has increased 500 percent despite a decrease in rate of injuries. (source: <http://scaffoldlaw.org/the-facts/>).

To put this in personal terms: When we started Alta Access, our contracting arm, the original quote for insuring this entity was an annual premium of \$42,000 for 49 states. If we wanted to add New York State, the premium would rise to an additional \$150,000. That is a clear reflection of how the insurance industry views risks associated with work in New York State.

**Applicator:** Tell us where you’d like to see yourself in the next five years.

**Kelly Streeter:** As I age, the industrial rope access site work gets harder and harder on my body. As I slowly transition away from site work, I will continue to pursue leadership positions in organizations, such as the SWR Institute, that help us to grow our businesses.

**About the Author**

Abbie Stutzer is a staff writer at Networx Communication Corp who writes for the *Applicator*.

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