

# Laura Kopetsky Tri-Ax

## Driven by Legacy

By Rebecca Patrick

A good team gets the job done. The “dream team,” as it’s called at Laura Kopetsky Tri-Ax, shows up for the work – and each other. The people – from the owner to drivers, dispatch crew and office staff – deliver top-notch customer service, solve problems on the fly and take pride in doing things the right way.

That winning culture blossomed out of a story you don’t find often in heavy hauling: a woman-led company with a distinct sense of style. It’s well known in Indianapolis for its pink and vibrant dump trucks (driven mostly by men and a handful of women) – and a legacy that began when founder Laura Kopetsky climbed into the cab at 19 years old in 1980.

Kopetsky had been inspired by her parents, who were involved in all sorts of businesses, including construction. Her dad gave her the downpayment for her first truck. Today, Kopetsky’s daughter, Amie Martens, carries things forward with a people-first mentality, steady resolve and her own approach to doing business.

### Laying the foundation

For Martens, the company isn’t just a family enterprise – it was embedded in her childhood. “I was born in ‘82, so I literally grew up here,” she remarks. And like many second-generation leaders, Martens once tried to put distance between herself and the family business, where she worked during summers in high school. She went to college, then law school and built a career as an attorney.

But Tri-Ax pulled her back in 2018, when a key employee was preparing to retire. “My mom asked me if I would come two or three days a week to help during the transition,” Martens recalls. She agreed to help – at first part time – handling financial work and filling gaps where needed.

Then in July 2019, Kopetsky died unexpectedly. The loss was not only personal but raised an immediate question for the founder-led company: What happens next?

Martens remembers the decision in clear terms. “Of course, I could have said, ‘No,



Amie Martens says her late mother would be surprised she decided to run the company and laughs, “She wouldn’t like the way I do some things, but (I represent a) different world.” Still, she knows her mom would love that the business is continuing.

‘I’m not doing this,’ but I decided I just wasn’t going to let her life’s work of 40 years go away,” she declares. “(Mom) passed on a Thursday, and on Monday I was here meeting with everybody, telling them we’re not going to miss a beat. We’re just going to keep going.”

It became even more of a family affair when Martens’ husband, Justin, came on board two years later in a sales role.

Tri-Ax stays intentionally small – with a headcount in the high 40s – so it can stay nimble.

Its bread and butter is hauling construction aggregate such as stone, sand, gravel and topsoil to commercial and residential job sites. The company also provides Bobcat and backhoe services for debris removal and cleanup, landscaping work and drainage clearing.

Ask Martens what distinguishes Tri-Ax, and she focuses on her staff and a shared commitment to problem-solving.

“One of the things we say is that we don’t really tell people ‘no’. We just figure it out, as long as it’s safe ... and go the extra mile.”

### On the same page

Martens leads by being present. While her mom ran things from home, she’s in the office daily.

Her focus is making it easier for people to do good work through clearly defined roles, consistent coaching and better systems.

“I am all about training,” Martens notes.

“Because if you’re not learning something or doing something, then what are you doing? You should always do something to better yourself.”

For office employees, that manifests itself in annual participation in a professional or personal development seminar or class of their choosing.

“We call ourselves the dream team because it really is like nowhere else that (we) ever have worked before,” enthuses Stephanie Waddell, customer service and dispatch manager, who’s been with the company a dozen years over her two stints.

“I love it that every day presents a new challenge. ... I feel like the burnout is not at all like other places ... because everything is so different and we all work so well together, too,” she continues.

“Amie’s really put a lot of time into team building and communication (including the DiSC Assessment® behavioral tool), and we all fit really well together. I think that’s the best part.”

### Standing out

Martens also has prioritized offering benefits that really resonate: 401(k) retirement matching, life insurance, \$25 per month towards either an Aflac or Globe Life product and matching up to \$20 per week in health savings account contributions.

Providing healthcare coverage or

healthcare allowance was something Martens pushed for when she returned in 2018. She recognized it would be a differentiator in her industry. Today, Tri-Ax pays “about 65% of premiums.”

There’s a retention policy that kicks in for drivers when the business slows down during the winter months. If a driver doesn’t work at least three days a week, the company supplements their paycheck to reach an amount over what they would make if laid off and on unemployment.

Martens offers, “I am not worried about losing drivers anymore because I know now that they can’t get what they have here anywhere else. . . . But it’s always nice to hear, ‘I like my job, and I’m not planning to go anywhere.’ ”

When there are health challenges among staff, Martens tries to create solutions that protect the individual and the team. “Instead of letting them go because of their (extended) absence, I’ve given them the option to take a leave, get their health together, and then come back so that they can be a productive employee,” she explains.

“We had a driver in a really bad motorcycle accident. . . . I held his job open



In addition to schedule flexibility, Laura Kopetsky Tri-Ax boasts fun company gatherings and time for community engagement. In September, Employee Appreciation Week includes lunches, giveaways and a cookout.

for him. It was over a year before he came back. . . . And I would do it again.”

Waddell maintains, “I love that we’re a woman-owned business and (one) that’s been in business for 46 years. . . . We’re playing in the boys’ sandbox and they let us – and we

love it!

“(People) know that when we show up in our pink and purple trucks, we’re going to work and get the job done. And I love that our image is out there, too, for others to see everything we represent.”

**RESOURCE:** Amie Martens, Laura Kopetsky Tri-Ax, at [www.laurakopetsky.com](http://www.laurakopetsky.com)

